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"It is a profession that is new, unlimited and rich!": the promotion of the American fashion designer in the 1930s

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NOTE TO USERS

"It is a profession that is new, unlimited and rich!" The promotion of the American fashion designer in the 1930s

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the American fashion designer portrayed through diverse publicity generated in various popular culture formats during the Depression era, 1930-1940. Through career literature, fiction, feature film, and promotion in magazine articles, the American woman came to know the creators of her fashions. Themes of wholesale design, retail design, income and perquisites, education and training emerged. Other themes such as client relations, selling, work process, and attitudes toward the French mystique were also discussed. A picture developed of a profession with unlimited opportunity which allowed women to rise to executive leadership, utilize creativity and artistic talent, earn a lucrative salary, and enjoy travel and lavish social opportunities.

Over fifty designers were profiled in career literature and magazine interviews during an era that has been widely regarded as one where designers worked in complete anonymity. American designers of the 1930s were promoted as feminine, chic, sophisticated, wealthy, and original on one hand. On the other hand they were regular people, practical, managerial, and American. Promotion with this combination of traits and qualities made them superstars. American designers were not dressmakers in the employ of wealthy patrons. They were the new leaders of style and good taste, yet approachable to the estimated 45 million American women who purchased garments manufactured by the American apparel industry.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE AND METHODS

By the end of the twentieth century, the role of the fashion designer was elevated to international celebrity status and became the quintessential icon for the apparel industry. One writer described fashion designers as an integral part of "the international personality circus,"[1] with the American contingent well represented in this spectacle. Fashion designers have become part of the entertainment landscape. Isaac Mizrahi has been billed as a "fashionable designer/entertainer," has been a guest on popular talk shows, and hosts his own show "The Isaac Mizrahi Show" on Oxygen TV.[2] Other designers enjoy runway coverage on the style.®network television network, and Bravo TV has recently launched a new series, "Project Runway," billed as "the first ever reality series focusing on fashion designers."[3] Fashion and its creation is entertainment in this current era. However, a century ago, the profession of fashion designer barely existed in the United States. I became curious about how, as a profession, fashion design progressed.

This is not to say that designing was not happening in America a hundred years ago and that design skills were not being developed and utilized. Indeed they were. Paris was the recognized seat of style and great design and, as such, created its own spectacle with fashion. But a host of American apparel creators - dressmakers, costume designers, tailors, ladies tailors – each were engaged not only in the construction of garments, but also in design and embellishment as well. French designers could not always accurately accommodate the tastes and lifestyles of American women. Fashionable American women relied upon their

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[1] Colin McDowell, The Designer Scam, (London: Random House, 1994), 39.
[2] Oh! Oxygen TV, "The Isaac Mizrahi Show," http://www.oxygen.com/isaac/about.aspx (Retrieved January 23, 2005).
[3] Bravo TV, "Project Runway," http://www.bravotv.com/Project_Runway/ (Retrieved 23 January 2005).

dressmakers to know what was *au courant* from France, and to also be able to interpret and manipulate those styles for the needs of American women.

But at what point did this profession of fashion design become spectacle, entertainment, a contribution to American popular culture? One locus for change was Women's roles in the workplace which evolved throughout the twentieth century. Areas of employment considered appropriate women expanded. College enrollment among women significantly increased in the 1920s. Shifts in clothing needs came with these career and lifestyle changes, increasing the demand for affordable, fashionable clothing. From this, American design was born. The needs of a growing mass production enterprise, combined with the lackluster image of an industry bearing a legacy of sweatshop working conditions and poor immigrant labor, spurred the need for positive promotion.

Economic challenges also impacted the promotion of the American garment industry. The Great Depression of the 1930s limited resources for manufacturers to travel to Paris. And those who could still afford the travel faced enormous duty on foreign purchases due to protectionist efforts on the part of the government such as the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930. Organizations promoting women's career interests, both inside and outside the apparel industry, increased and focused their promotional efforts. Upgrading the image of the apparel industry in terms of employment also upgraded the image of the product to the consumer. The combination of all of these factors influenced the development of the persona of the American fashion designer in a host of popular culture formats. As fashion design developed in the apparel industry, both the persona and profession began to appear popular culture formats including feature magazine articles, career literature, fiction and feature film. Through promotion and exposure, this career option was becoming part of the cultural

landscape during the early part of the twentieth century. The term *fashion designer* also first appeared during the 1930s.

The apparel industry of the 1930s was becoming more and more a mass production enterprise serving millions of women. Custom work, and those who could afford such service, dwindled throughout the 1930s in the U.S. The French industry catered to the elite, the top echelon of the world's society who could afford to pay for luxurious clothing and who had the time to spend on dressing well and keeping a perfectly polished appearance. The American business needed to demonstrate to the consumer that American fashion was not just a series of copies from Paris. To do this, the American fashion designer, her style leadership, practicality and originality were promoted to the popular masses. To elevate the image of American fashion, its creator, the American fashion designer, also needed to be elevated. The American fashion designer depicted in 1930s popular culture was at once chic, sophisticated, original and wealthy, but also approachable to the masses as American, feminine, lively, vibrant and practical.

By structuring this study with popular culture representations of the fashion designer, this profession can be studied in terms of the picture that was created by its promoters. Popular culture, by definition, is created and circulated largely by the industries that generate mass communication; film, radio, publishing and news media. But it is also a result of a courtship between mass communicators and the mass public. The mass public has to accept or consume the information to ensure continued accounts being represented. Unlike high

culture, which is determined and established by the most elite echelons of a society, popular culture is what is embraced and recognized by common people.[4]

While several aspects of the social and economic history of the apparel/fashion industry have been examined by historians, apparel industry history lacks clear examination of the evolution of the profession of the fashion designer. The modern day function of the fashion designer in many ways evolved along with growing mass production of apparel for women.[5] This study contributes to the understanding of this profession and will provide greater insight into how fashion design evolved into a prominent profession.

Researchers have investigated the factors contributing to the emergence of the American designer beginning with Nazi occupation of Paris in 1940, thus ending French fashion communication to the U.S. for the duration of World War II. Only a small body of scholarship has examined the preceding years and the preparation of the American industry that make this evolution possible.[6] During the Depression era, however, the American garment industry was moving forward and developing its own promotional programs and a marketing structure to support American design. Industry associates (primarily women), both in New York and in Los Angeles, formed their own professional organizations with mission statements directed toward promotion of the industry and educational enhancements.

This study examines the early development of fashion design as a newly emerging career opportunity in the twentieth century. My analysis concentrates on the American

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[4] John Curtis, "The Study of Popular Culture by Academia in the United States," (in companion with a display/exhibit at the Milwaukee School of Engineering: Walther Schroeder Library) <http://www.msoe.edu/library/dr_who/study_of_popular_culture.htm> (Retrieved 13 February 2005); "Popular culture," Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pop_culture> (Retrieved 13 February 2005).

[5] Mary Donahue, "Design and the Industrial Arts in America, 1894-1940: An Inquiry into Fashion Design and Art and Industry," (Ph. D. diss., The City University of New York, 2001).

[6] Donahue: Throughout her dissertation, Donahue analyzes aspects of the evolution of art in industry from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century. She uses the profession of fashion design as the cornerstone of her investigation.

fashion designer from1930 to 1940 and how this new profession and persona was depicted in popular culture representations.

Popular culture platforms provide an intriguing portal for this examination by offering a perspective of how this profession was represented to various constituencies. For example, numerous magazine articles promoted both the American apparel industry and the American apparel product, specifically women's clothing, through featuring the designers. By promoting apparel created by competent, talented American designers, the industry positioned itself as more able to provide a design perspective better suited than European styling to the needs and lifestyles of American women. Promoters implied that the French designer simply could not provide such insight.[7] But through this promotion of the American designer (most often a woman) a message of glamour or prestige was sent to young women about fashion design as a career opportunity. I will explore the content of this message, both in terms of written and visual information.

My research is presented in three parts. Chapter 3 examines career literature and career fiction. Career literature promoted the profession of fashion design, as well as other industry professions, to potential candidates. This material was generated with the intention to equip young men and women with necessary information to explore career choices in the apparel industry. These offerings were published by both those operating outside the industry, such as The National Association for Vocational Guidance, and by inside promoters of the industry such as The National Dry Good Retail Association and The Fashion Group. The examination of the contents will illuminate how the apparel industry was positioning

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7 Mary Donahue, "Educating Women for the Feminine Apparel Industry: Fashion Design, Dressmaking, and Domesticity, New York 1894-1950," Knowledge and Society, 2000, 12.

fashion design within its structure, and how it was positioning itself as a potential employer. Included in this review is career literature generated during the early part of the twentieth century which focused on fashion design as a possible career choice. I demonstrate how the role of the designer was constructed by authors and publishers of career literature, as well as examine social, industry and economic motivations. By using examples from 1911, 1920 and 1922, in addition to volumes written throughout the 1930s, I will analyze how factors such as job configuration, wages, status and working conditions were depicted during the early development of this career area.

I have identified relevant sources through database searches on WorldCat, Historic Abstracts, American History, and JSTOR, using the following search terms: *vocational education, vocational guidance, career information, career literature*, and *career girls*. I narrowed my review to those sources which contained information specifically on the profession of fashion design and were published in proximity to the research period. I allowed the sources to tell their own story, from which I identified several themes: the role, job descriptions and status of the retail designer, wholesale designer, and Hollywood designer; entry into the profession and necessary education and training; compensation, perquisites and benefits. Chapter 3 also examines a form of career information which emerged during the 1930s, called career books or career fiction. An offshoot of the popular series fiction format for young readers, it provided information to adolescents and young adults about a variety of career opportunities in a fictional story format. This genre gained popularity from 1940 through the 1970s, however early contributions were written in the late 1930s. Using the search terms *fiction/fashion/juvenile, career fiction, Dodd, Mead and*

Company, and *career girl* I have identified three of the earliest career novels from this genre which addressed the apparel industry.

Chapter 4 examines depictions of American fashion design and designers published in a variety of periodicals. From 1930 through 1940, the American fashion designer and the profession of fashion design, were promoted throughout the decade in a variety of mainstream business and popular publications such as Fortune, Life, Collier's and others. Fashion publications, like Vogue or Harper's Bazaar, provided the least exposure. It was the mainstream press that presented the American designer to the dress-buying public long before 1940, the time which is often noted as the debut of the American designer to the public.

My search began with the following volumes from The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature (TRGPL): 1929-1932, 1932-1935, 1935-1937, 1937-1939, 1939-1941, using search terms *clothing, dress, clothing industry, dressmakers, costume, costume design, fashion, fashion designer (stylists)*. I narrowed my review of articles to those specifically addressing topics of design, designers, teaching design, changes in industry, labor issues (selected), America and design, and articles by designers. I extended my search to publications which were not indexed by (TRGPL). Those publications included Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Mademoiselle, and Glamour. I reviewed these publications by visually scanning the index of each available issue, using the same search criterion as for those publications I listed for (TRGPL). Vogue and Harper's Bazaar were scanned from the January 1930 – December 1940 issues. Mademoiselle was scanned from February 1935 – December 1940. Glamour was viewed on microfilm from April 1939 – December 1940. My

search also included review of the bibliographies of identified primary and secondary sources, retrieving relevant information for further examination and analysis.

Chapter 5 examines depictions of fashion design as a profession and the fashion designer in feature Hollywood films and in a several cases, the novels which inspired those films. As goes society, so go the movies. Movies, often more than written fiction, mirror what is familiar and engaging to a society. One film critic and historian observed "...the Hollywood movie can be considered a valid reflector of our popular tastes and values."[8] Filmmakers make choices for film depiction based upon the ability of the audience to identify with what is familiar. As such, movies capture a moment in time, and with that moment capture perceptions, trends and perspectives. Movies relied on mass appeal to be successful and were made to identify with the broadest audience possible, not just an elite few. Movies from a given era become part of the cultural landscape and contain valuable information and documentation, much like magazines, popular fiction or other elements of popular culture. Hand in hand with film, fictional representations of the fashion designer emerged during the 1930s. Historians have claimed that fiction serves as a barometer, reflector and often reshapes an image to the audience.[9]

My search began with The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), a searchable database accessible on the World Wide Web. I identified films using the following search terms: *fashion, design, dressmaker, Paris, shop, retail, wholesale, factory,* and *seamstress.* The films produced and released during this research period were: Street of Women (1932), Fashions of 1934 (1934), Roberta (1935), Vogues of 1938 (1937), and Irene (1940). Access

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8 Wiley Lee Umphlett, The Movies Go to College, (London: Associated University Presses, 1984) 9.
9 Laura Hapke, Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work and Fiction in the American 1930s, (Athens, G.A.: The University of Georgia Press. 1995) xvii.

to Street of Women and Irene were made possible through the courtesy of The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.[10] These films were in a 16mm format and were viewed on a Steinbeck table viewer at the Wisconsin Historical Society on the campus of the University of Wisconsin – Madison, Wisconsin. Fashions of 1934 and Vogues of 1938 were accessed through Iowa State University, Parks Library interlibrary loan services and viewed from a videocassette format. Roberta is part of my personal videocassette collection. Street of Women and Roberta were adapted from the novels Street of Women by Polan Banks and Gowns by Roberta by Alice Duer Miller.

In an initial review of these films, I found this profession portrayed in a positive, upstanding manner, in keeping with the genre of the "women's film" if the designer was a woman. The fashion designer was sometimes portrayed as a woman. If the designer was female, she was attractive, smart, independent, hard-working and dedicated. She spoke and acted as if well-educated, showed great ingenuity but generally suffered from a lack of either respect or recognition. Throughout this discussion, I examine the construction of the persona of the fashion designer through themes of appearance and manner of the designer, work process, class and gender issues, customer relationships, antagonism toward Paris, and the absence of the California industry.

I also reviewed movie fan magazines. Photoplay was a popular publication which reported on film news and was published consistently during the 1930s without interruption. Accessibility to this collection was made available through the courtesy of the University of Kansas – Watson Library Microforms department. I scanned the indexes of this publication

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[10] Wisconsin Historical Society: The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, University of Wisconsin – Madison, Wisconsin, 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706. (Accessed June 2004).

from January 1930 - December 1940 searching for articles on design, designers, articles by designers, articles about the specific films reviewed in this research, and photographs or information about the stars of those films.[11] Through this examination of various popular culture primary source materials, I have framed a comprehensive study of the promotion of the fashion designer in the 1930s.

[11] The Watson Library Microforms, University of Kansas – Lawrence, Kansas, 1425 Jayhawk Blvd., Lawrence, K.S. (Accessed September 2004).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

By the latter part of the twentieth century, top fashion designers who worked under their own name were predominantly men, but early in the development of this career area, organizations dedicated to women's professional development such as The Fashion Group and Institute of Women's Professional Relations, in partnership with The Federated Council on Art Education, actively promoted this profession to women. The apparel trades had traditionally been considered an appropriate area of employment for women, so it is not surprising that the designers photographed, featured and interviewed in 1930s career literature and periodicals were mostly women. Therefore, in order to frame this examination of fashion designers in popular culture within the context of the broader social and commercial issues of the 1930s, I have reviewed scholarly literature concentrating on a specific scope of relevant topics. First of all, I discuss women and wage-earning, the apparel industry in the United States and women's roles in its development. Also relevant to this discussion is a review of film criticism, especially the 'women's film' genre. My review also includes information regarding career literature promoting apparel industry occupations, and the fashion designer in the United States.

Women and Wage-Earning

Studies of women's roles in the work place, wage-earning and how these roles changed during the twentieth century are held up to a backdrop of two major factors: the impact of immigrants on the American workforce and the development of technology in industry. As a major employer of women for most of the twentieth century, and involving both technology and immigrant employment, the apparel industry is often included in these

studies of the early histories of wage earning women.[1] There is, however, little that analyzes the creative or management roles of women in the design, development, production or marketing of apparel.

Philosophies of the separate spheres of "women's work" and "men's work" played a significant role in the popularity of the apparel trades as a mode of viable or appropriate employment for women. While increasingly linked with technology, which was considered a male sphere, the women's apparel industry also had strong ties to dressmaking and domesticity which was considered a female sphere.[2] Many considered wage-earning by women as a marginal, temporary endeavor undertaken only until entering into marriage or motherhood. Education and training for the apparel trades was considered less wasteful since this instruction and work experience would also serve to improve skills eventually used in homemaking.[3] Alice Kessler-Harris pointed out that wage-earning and training for trades was targeted to "the period previous to marriage, or if she does not marry, for the period of her working life, or for the married woman who, because of widowhood, desertion, childlessness, or some other deviation from normal married life, returns to industry as a wage-earner."[4]

This attitude of "women's" versus "men's" work naturally limited the range of "appropriate" employment for women who chose to or had necessity to work outside their home in a wage-earning capacity. Women employed outside the home primarily worked in

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1 Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1882); Nancy L. Green, Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995, (College Station, T.X.: Texas A&M University Press, 1997).
2 Donahue, 109.
3 Kessler-Harris, 174.
4 Kessler-Harris, 174; cited from "Vocational Training for Women in Industry," file 79, box 5, BVI Collection.

nursing, teaching, domestic, clerical, factory or retail jobs during the early twentieth century. Within this limited scope of employment choices, each field resided along a continuum of hierarchy and prestige. In Out to Work, Kessler-Harris described this hierarchical chain:

> Within their own economic sphere wage-earning women developed hierarchies of desirable occupations that were, of course, class based. Professional jobs headed the list. Nursing and teaching, because they did not require sacrifice of the feminine role, remained the most frequent choices.... Women with less training tended to choose office work above department store clerking. And those with few skills were factory workers, waitresses, and domestic servants, in that order. To some extent this hierarchy reflected class, ethnic, and racial distinctions in the work force as a whole as well as the preferences of employers for 'American-born' workers. Yet insofar as it reflected women's own choices it was based on such values as cleanliness, affirmation of home roles, and possibilities of remaining 'good.'[5]

Within this hierarchical chain of women's employment, each career field had levels of prestige within its own ranks as well. The apparel industry was no exception. For example, the custom apparel trade of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century included seamstresses, who remade or altered garments or made simple garments from existing patterns; ladies tailors, who made tailored garments out of wool for women, gaining most of their training from the men's tailored garment industry; and dressmakers, who made garments of fine fabrics often complex in their execution, drafted or draped original patterns, performed personal consultation with clients and provided expert advice on design and fabric selection. Each level required an increasingly higher level of skill, workmanship and creativity, with dressmaking at the pinnacle for much of this period. Dressmaking held a high level of prestige within the ranks of the apparel trade. According to Sharon Fivel in From Carriage Trade to Ready-Made, "dressmaking was considered a prestigious occupation – and a field that [women] could enter without serious competition from men. It gave an

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5 Kessler-Harris, 128-135.

alternative to factory work and the chance for skilled employment, comparatively high wages, privileged status in the working class, and, most importantly, a kind of upward mobility not available in other careers."[6]

As with women's employment in general, class and ethnicity entered into a woman's success as a dressmaker. Successful dressmakers of the highest echelon were looked upon as arbiters of fashion. Clients relied upon this expertise and looked upon the gentility and manners of the dressmaker as an indicator of taste level and fashion authority.[7]

Trends in clothing needs shifted over time and with this, perceived prestige of these apparel occupations also shifted. As more women entered the workforce in a wage-earning capacity, the need for appropriate business attire increased. Different jobs or professions carried with them different standards of what was considered appropriate attire, but in general there was an overall increase in the popularity and necessity of tailored garments. The position of the ladies tailor (who was often a man) eventually rivaled that of the dressmaker.[8] Eventually, at varying rates and for a variety of reasons, from about 1910 to the 1920s the demand for ready – made clothing surpassed that for custom made clothing.[9]

Increased interest in ready-made clothing fostered the importance of retailing and the department store, which enjoyed its golden age from the late nineteenth century through the 1930s and provided numerous employment opportunities. Retail careers offered unique opportunities for women compared to other work outside the home not requiring specialized

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6 Sharon Fivel, From Carriage Trade to Ready-Made: St. Louis Clothing Designers, 1880-1920, (M.O.: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1992),13, cited from Wendy Gamber, The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930 (Ph.D. diss. Brandeis University, 1990), 6, 102.
7 Fivel, 14.
8 Fivel, 24
9 Jean Parsons, "No Longer a 'Frowsy Drudge.' Women's Wardrobe Management: 1880-1930, Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 20 no. 1 (2001): 37; Fivel, 24.

education or training. For many women with less educational training than, for example, nurses or teachers, department store work during this era offered opportunity. By way of more egalitarian promotional policies than in other industries, women were rewarded for dedication and hard work.[10] Upward mobility into executive level positions was very attainable for women with little formal education. And while the lion share of the female corps were in sales or other more subordinate positions, women with education, poise and talent had unequalled opportunities for management careers. Benson reported that a 1920 survey indicated that just under half of all buyers were women.[11] And, in addition to buying, there were also opportunities in personnel, modeling, administration, personal shopping or stock management.

Trends in formal education for women shifted significantly in the early part of the twentieth century, impacting decisions on potential careers. Women's attendance at college increased vastly during the early part of the twentieth century. It was reported that by 1920, over 431,000 women were enrolled in colleges across the United States, and comprised 43.7 of the total college population. Career possibilities expanded further and fashion was an opening frontier.[12]

The American Apparel Industry

Changes in education, work and wage-earning for American women contributed to and altered trends in apparel consumption during the early twentieth century. With the

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10 Estelle Hamburger, It's a Women's Business, (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1939). Estelle Hamburger shared the story of her career in retail promotion and advertising. Beginning as a temporary employee in the personnel department sent by a local secretarial school, she quickly and cleverly worked her way into a full-time position as a copywriter in the Macy's advertising department.

11 Susan Porter Benson, Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940, (Chicago, I.L.: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 214.

12 Linda Leuzzi, A Matter of Style: Women in the Fashion Industry, (Danbury, C.T.: Franklin Watts Publishing, 1996), 46-47.

changes in the lives of women as wage-earners, changes also took place in their needs as clothing consumers. In "American Fashion: The Tirocchi Sisters in Context," Madelyn Shaw discussed the growing need for "stylish apparel" for women along a wide range of economic levels as the American middle class broadened and women entered the workforce in a diverse array of jobs.[13] And as clothing selection broadened, so did the appeal of ready-made clothing. As the technology of manufacturing of clothing expanded, styles began to change more rapidly. Advertising and marketing through popular culture formats became an important part of the apparel selling process. Parsons stated that "ready-made manufacturers and retailers began to incorporate and manipulate the fashion process in an attempt to create demand for their products."[14]

While fashion information to the consumer began far earlier than the twentieth century, the scale on which it was distributed expanded significantly during the early twentieth century. Additionally, not only the amount of information but the ways in which it was disseminated expanded. Growing popularity of the American film added a new component of fashion information, not only through the costume design for feature films but through news reels providing the latest information on fashion and publicity shots of stars in chic clothing. Live fashion shows were held at movie theaters and local hotels. Manufacturers offered sample books of fabric swatches and product information to consumers for a small fee. These promotions, along with other factors such as price, perceived quality and wider availability of styles, shifted preference to ready-made garments. During the early twentieth century women's ready-to-wear came to the forefront. With

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13 Madelyn Shaw, "American Fashion: The Tirocchi Sisters in Context," in From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947, ed. Susan Hay, (Providence, R.I.: Rhode Island School of Design, 2000), 105-130.
14 Parsons, 40.

sewing one's own garments, and custom apparel – both from France and from American dressmakers – still very viable options, by the late 1920s ready-made clothing purchases exceeded that of any other source.[15] By the 1960s, Jessica Daves, in Ready Made Miracle, described ready-made clothing for women as touching "perhaps ninety-nine percent of our citizens."[16]

The American ready-to-wear industry of the early twentieth century emerged in the shadow of the legendary French fashion industry and its acclaimed chic. During the reign of Louis XIV, Paris established itself as the leader of women's fashion in the Western world and maintained its claim through the early twentieth century. A combination of fashion leadership and example on the part of Louis XIV and his court, combined with concerted efforts on the part of the French government to promote and protect the silk weaving industry in France, provided the foundation on which the Paris couture and dressmaking industry grew and flourished.[17]

The French industry maintained its leadership and mystique through an organized educational system to support the industry and a well-orchestrated promotional effort including design protection through *Le Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*. But even with French chic well entrenched in the minds of the American consumer, it was clear that by the late 1920s Americans were exerting a strong influence on the French industry. American travel to Europe, and specifically to Paris, was at its peak during the 1920s. Due to favorable exchange rates for the French franc, Americans (both individuals and businesses) possessed extraordinary spending power. Shoppers in Paris, as well as the consumer stateside

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15 Shaw, 108-109; Parsons, 33.
16 Jessica Daves, Ready Made Miracle: The American Story of Fashion of the Millions, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 9.
17 Valerie Steele, Paris Fashion: A Cultural History, (New York: Berg, 1998), 23.

represented an enormous segment of the French industry's revenue, and in spite of the average woman's allegiance to Paris for fashion direction, this powerful influence was recognized by fashion industry leadership. In 1928, Vogue reported:

> The Paris mode, however lovely, is not quite the mode worn in America. For, from out of the wealth of models in the great collections, certain ones are chosen by the buyers from America--chosen because of their chic and their charm and, more especially, because of their suitability to the needs and the life of the American woman.[18]

A travel guide from 1929 confirmed this influence in their advice to the American tourist:

> Let us assure you that, while the clothes you buy are made in Paris, a good deal of the inspiration for them comes from this side of the big pond. Dorothy Shaver...director of...a large New York department store...declares that American buyers and fashion magazines help to control French fashion....[19]

According to Elizabeth Hawes, by 1928 "the edges were cracking" in the French industry and the myth of French chic could not continue much longer due to the extensive practice of selling designs to American manufacturers for copying.[20] While working in Paris as a designer in the 1920s, Hawes observed how American manufacturers came to Paris twice a year on buying trips, bringing with them copyists and designers. The American industry developed a practice of using only certain elements of the French models as inspiration and reinterpreted these ideas into clothing suitable for American life. Buyers and manufacturers for the American woman were growing perplexed at the impracticality of French designs and lamented "...we can do better than that ourselves."[21] Even the exact

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18 "Peaks and Pitfalls of 1928: Paris Proposes a New Mode and America Disposes of it to Suit Her Own Requirements, Vogue, 1928, October 27, 40.
19 H. Josephy and M. McBride, Paris is a Woman's Town, (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1929), 7.
20 Elizabeth Hawes, Fashion is Spinach, (New York: Random House, 1938), 111.
21 Hawes, 112-113.

fabric was available and the American textile industry had the technology to copy at a much cheaper price.[22]

Due to a combination of several factors, including unique lifestyle and clothing needs of American women, war, homeland allegiance, and the specific design needs of mass clothing production for the wholesale industry, American design was born. But it was born through many stages over an extended period time and with varying degrees of success and enthusiasm. With a legacy of sweatshop workers, child laborers and immigrant staffing, the American apparel industry in many ways lacked the "fashionable" appeal of Paris to the consumer. The low prestige of the workers hurt the image of the industry.

In Paris Fashion Valerie Steele described a rebellion among many Americans against Paris fashions in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in an attempt to build a national identity, establish an American cultural heritage and support the American economy through the purchase of domestically produced clothing. But this was the feeling primarily of the middle and lower-middle class American. Steele reported that the American industrial upper class still favored European modes and style.[23] In 1912, however, the feeling that American design efforts were substantial encouraged the New York Times to promote a contest for American designers. The year before, in 1911, Saks & Company promoted in-house American fashions.[24] So, even prior to World War I, the American industry was beginning to assert itself in terms of not only production capability, but in design capability as well.

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22 Hawes, 111-112; Crawford, 115
23 Steele, Paris Fashion: A Cultural History, 233.
24 Leuzzi, 42.

The Great War (World War I) broke out in 1914. Germany declared war on France, limiting access by American buyers and merchants to Paris. While the United States was relatively unaffected until its own entry to the war in 1917, American buyers could not visit Paris on buying trips, so they developed a greater reliance on domestic apparel.[25] M.D.C. Crawford, research editor of Women's Wear Daily, commented on the effects of World War I on American fashion consumers:

> During the quarter of a century after World War I, our designers had been well tutored by Paris. More important, our ways of living, our ideas of society have vastly changed. We still want fine apparel, but we are emerging from an age of individual elegance. Design in America has followed the pattern of our new ways of living, and these needs were paramount [more important than] a desire to follow Parisian fashion. ...these changes were inevitable and Paris might, in another decade, have been more influenced by New York than New York by Paris.[26]

During the post World War I era, industry professionals began to organize into protective and promotional groups. Of specific note is the development of The Fashion Group. In 1928 a distinguished group of industry professionals met to begin discussion about what in 1931 became The Fashion Group, a professional organization to promote female fashion executives. Among this pilot group were a constituency of young, relatively unknown designers who later became recognized as top American designers; Claire McCardell, Lily Daché, Edith Head and Adele Simpson.[27] Recent scholarship examining American design contends that most American designs until World War II were merely

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25 Leuzzi, 46-47.
26 Crawford, 19
27 "The Fashion Group International Records," The New York Public Library: Manuscript and Archives Division The Research Libraries – Humanities and Social Science Library <http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/spe/rbk/faids/fgi/> (Retrieved 24 August 2003).

copies of French models.[28] However this claim overlooks the protective efforts on the part of the apparel industry. For example, in 1932, designers, manufacturers and other related industry professionals united to form the Fashion Originators Guild of America, a regulatory group organized to control copying and piracy of original apparel designs from the American industry. This effort by industry to seek protection reinforces the idea that manufacturers and designers were creating original design expression for lucrative commercial purposes beyond copying French styles and trends.[29]

At the same time that The Fashion Group and the Fashion Originators Guild of America were forming, "The American designers movement" began to build momentum on the retail front. In April of 1932, after several years of observing the marketplace, Dorothy Shaver, Vice President of Lord & Taylor in New York, launched a store promotion, showcasing American designers. The first designers were Elizabeth Hawes, chosen for her sporty, youthful designs, Annette Simpson for her more upscale, sophisticated look. Not leaving out the home sewing customer in this promotion, Shaver included Edith Marie Reuss for her patterned fabric designs, which were marketed as yard goods in the fabric department. Best & Company ran an American design promotion in 1929. Others attempted to promote American design earlier, during the World War I era, but Dorothy Shaver's particular style of promotion and merchandising launched this initiative in a most innovative way. The upshot of the campaign was to "create a cult of personality around American fashion designers

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28 Sandra Stansbery Buckland and Gwendolyn S. O'Neal, "We Publish Fashions Because They are News: The New York Times 1940 through 1945," Dress, 1998, 33; Gayle Strege, "American Fashion: Ready to Wear,"in Fashion American Style, ed. Gayle Strege, (Columbus, O.H.: Ohio State University, 2002), 11.

29 Sara Brubacher and Jean Parsons, "The Fashion Originators Guild of America: Promoting American Design, 1932-1941," presented at the Costume Society of America Annual Meeting, May 2004, Houston, T.X.

similar to that surrounding French couturiers."[30] Shaver accomplished this through lavish store displays, photographs of the designers used in promotion and advertising, their autographs with their photo, and designer appearances at luncheons and special events. New designers were added to the promotion in subsequent years, including Clare Potter, Muriel King, Ruth Payne, Alice Smith, Vera Maxwell and Helen Cookman.[31]

Much of this change is reported to have been the result of chaotic developments on the domestic front experienced by the American apparel industry a decade earlier. In Made in New York, Roy B. Helfgott described the 1920s in the apparel industry as "an eventful and dramatic decade."[32] He cited two factors in the 1920s which caused shifts in manufacturing and marketing trends in the New York industry causing a long term ripple effect on the American apparel industry. First, Congress terminated immigration in the 1920s which significantly impacted the New York labor pool and caused manufacturers to look elsewhere for labor sources. Second, he credited the increasing importance of fashion after World War I as an impetus for increased emphasis on merchandising.[33] In the 1920s the selling process was becoming much more organized and centralized, with a growing trend toward showroom selling versus traveling sales representative and sample selling.

With immigration terminated during this period the industry had significant need to promote itself as an employer to other constituencies. One solution was to provide specific training and education. An innovative New York educator, Mortimer C. Ritter, lobbied the

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[30] Tiffany Webber-Hanchett, "Dorothy Shaver: Promoter of 'The American Look,'" Dress, 2003, 83.
[31] Webber-Hanchett; "The Dorothy Shaver Papers," Archive Center of the National Museum of American History – Smithsonian Institute: On-line finding aid and archival biography <http://americanhistory.si.edu/archives/d7631.htm> (Retrieved 6 April 2005).
32 Roy B. Helfgott, "Women's and Children's Apparel," in Made in New York: Case Studies in Metropolitan Manufacturing, ed. Max Hall, (M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 54.
33 Helfgott, 54-55.

school board to start a special high school. He met with considerable resistance but eventually prevailed. With 75 students in 1926, The Central High School of the Needle Trades opened in a garment district loft space to train people for jobs in the wholesale apparel industry and provide a high school level education. Most of these students initially were immigrants or children of immigrants but the student body gradually broadened. Through Works Projects Administration funding, construction began on a new facility in 1938 to accommodate an enrollment of over 4,500 students in both day and evening classes.[34] And in 1944, the program extended further to include a college. Ritter campaigned for an educational program jointly sponsored through private funding from the garment industry and the New York City Board of Education to train young people for positions in the garment industry. This program became The Fashion Institute of Technology.[35] A Business Week author described the situation:

> Workers of foreign extraction still predominate. Many skilled workers are getting on in years, and because the industry suffers from a lack of social and economic prestige, intelligent youngsters have been prone to forsake the family occupation. To attract competent young people and raise the caliber of workers, the Fashion Institute is offering free courses on the college level to those aspiring to be designers, junior executives, and technicians.[36]

In an attempt to elevate the profile of apparel work in the United States, apparently higher education was a key element.

Throughout the 1930s, wide spread economic depression drastically changed the economic, cultural, and industrial landscape. Unemployment reached record heights as the divide between the rich and poor widened. However, despite the stresses brought on by

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34 "Brief History of Fashion," High School for the Fashion Industries, <http://schools.nycenet.edu> (Retrieved 6 May 2004).
35 Dorothy Roe Lewis, "Snip and Tuck School," Collier's, 10 November 1945, 14.
36 "Styled in the U.S.A.," Business Week, 30 September 1944, 34.

financial downturns, there was a spirit of taking charge of one's own situation in order to care for the family and maintain a standard of living. Women, through a variety of domestic strategies to reduce consumer consumption, attempted to maintain their family's lifestyle. Women baked and canned for both their own family's use and to trade for other commodities. Home sewing became a common domestic practice. Women's historian Ruth Milkman reported that "people who had never sewed before attended night school classes to learn how to sew and remodel garments."[37] She wrote that women especially showed "amazing resourcefulness in coping with the [economic] crisis."[38]

To counter potential downturns in clothing consumption as a result of the Depression, Milbank reported that the American industry blossomed "in a climate where clients at every price point had become conscious of value."[39] Mass producers of clothing, Milbank stated, began to rely more heavily on native talent because purchasing French clothing for reproduction became more and more cost-prohibitive. American designers also created a distinct style through the innovative use of inexpensive fabrics such as corduroy, knits, and synthetic silk, or rayon, ultimately resulting in a look, fit, and feel distinctly American.

The California Market

New York and the East Coast were not the only center of fashion activity in America. Design and innovation progressed out west as well. As early as 1926, even before The Fashion Group organized in New York, a group of eight women designers from California formed a professional association called The Affiliated Fashionists of California to promote

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[37] Ruth Milkman, "Women's Work in Hard Times," in Major Problems in American History: 1920-1945, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 282.
[38] Milkman, 281.
[39] Caroline Rennolds Milbank, New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1989), 98.

California designs to buyers. Separated from the Eastern markets and born out of necessity, the California apparel business began, for the most part, in the 1920s and was provisional at best. Separated from the New York hub by over 3,000 miles and the Rocky Mountain Range, retailers had to wait too long to get their orders filled from Eastern manufacturers. The first garment companies set up shop to do nothing more than make exact copies of Paris and New York designs for the southern California clientele, but before long California life and climate demanded something much different.[40] By 1946 one writer described the California garment industry as "...a new industry—one that is pouring more into the Golden State than did the gold rush in its heyday."[41]

Mountains, a beach and balmy western breezes every day of the year added up to a way of life much different from that in the East. Lighter fabrications, freedom of movement and casual styling were necessities for active, outdoorsy California women and these traits could not be found in traditional clothing styled in the East and Midwest, knocked-off from Paris.[42] The first designers to enter the west designed for the motion picture industry. Motion picture designers separated themselves from Paris's influence long before the close of communication due to Nazi occupation in 1940. Due to the production demands of filmmaking, cinematic costume designers did not adhere to the same schedule as designers for ready-to-wear clothing. Often, even the most modern styles at the time of filming would

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40 Amy Porter, "Sun-Suit Strip," Collier's, 18 January 1947, 73.
41 Frank J. Taylor, "They Start the Fads," Saturday Evening Post, 9 November 1946, 31.
42 Marion Hall, Marjorie Carne and Sylvia Sheppard, California Fashion: From the Old West to New Hollywood, (New York: Harry N. Abrams 2002), 61.

look dated by the film's release. To counteract this effect, simplicity of design was adapted for films.[43] This influence spread.

With a basis for simpler designs coming from the neighboring movie industry, along with the rather secluded locale of California, the designers worked within a much different set of rules from their Eastern counterparts. These designers faced the job of finding a way to move from the prevailing perception of the California apparel business being "...a sort of screwy sideline to the movies"[44] to a legitimate answer to the clothing needs of the changing lifestyles of American women.

Other than taking a cue from the neighboring movie industry for simpler design styles, California designers separated themselves from their creative counterparts. Elizabeth Hawes wrote:

> The movies have kept up a pretty steady demand for metal cloth, beads, Diamonds, and gold lace, things which are quite horrible when bought for $8.75. Movie stars haven't affected the high-style people, but what a movie star wears carries a good deal of weight with the masses.[45]

The film industry, in its golden age, was not reaching the consumer audience California hoped to appeal to and, as such, marketing efforts did not intertwine.

Film and Literature Scholarship

Film Criticism and Scholarship

The motion picture industry presents a powerful voice – one that speaks to the masses rather than an elite few. A body of modern scholars who grew up going to the movies – members of the "film generation" – keeps a watchful, and interested, eye on this powerful

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43 Veronica Dierker, "The Relationship and Influences of the Hollywood Film Industry to the Fashion Industry During the Nineteen Twenties through the Nineteen Forties," 1979 (Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin), 8.

44 Taylor, 31.

45 Elizabeth Hawes, "New Women Make New Styles," Scribner's Magazine, September 1931, 298.

medium by way of scholarly criticism, review and analysis.[46] The apparel industry, however, has largely escaped scholarly notice. A discussion addressing this topic of the fashion industry in film begins with the women's film genre, relationships between film and fashion, including influences on the audience/consumer; and a review of other scholarly examinations of motion picture depictions of people and professions.

The film industry has a unique, long-lived connection with the apparel industry. In "Fashion and Glamour," Buckley and Gundle commented on this connection citing Jewish executives in Hollywood and the emphasis they placed on glamour. Importance of costume in films appeared to be an influence coming from the very top ranks of Hollywood leadership. Buckley and Gundle argued that members of the Jewish community, largely on the margins of society, used apparel to fit in and be accepted.[47] Not only was clothing an important expression to Hollywood's leaders but, interestingly, many of Hollywood's creators brought to their work foundations in the garment industry.[48] Adolph Zukor was a furrier; Marcus Loew sold fur and capes; Samuel Goldwyn sold gloves; Carl Laemmle worked in retail; William Fox was a fabric inspector for garment makers; Louis B. Mayer was a used clothing salesman; Harry Warner repaired shoes.[49] Stylish clothing was an important tool for Jewish people to achieve acceptance and 'belonging,' and these industry leaders had first-hand knowledge of the garment industry and the way it worked.

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46 Melva Joyce Baker, Images of Women in Film: The War Years, 1941-1945, (Ann Arbor, M.I.: UMI Research Press, 1978), xii.
47 Reka C.V. Buckley and Stephen Gundle, "Fashion and Glamour," in The Fashion Business: Theory, Practice and Image, ed., Nicola White and Ian Griffiths, (New York: Berg, 2000), 46.
48 Sara Berry, Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood, (M.N.: University Of Minnesota Press, 2000), xvii.
49 Berry, xvii.

The more familiar discussion of fashion and film is costumes and costume design for the motion pictures. Since film is a visual medium, costume plays an important part in this storytelling process and a considerable body of literature exists around fashion and costume in films.[50] There is also evidence of product promotion and style transmission through feature films. Sara Berry, author of Screen Style, pointed out the powerful marketing machine Hollywood proved to be in promoting a variety of cosmetic and clothing products and trends, mostly to women.[51]

An investigation into apparel industry portrayals in film might begin with "the woman's film." This is a genre of sorts used to define a wide array of films produced during the mid century about women. I say 'of sorts' because, according to Jeanine Basinger in A Woman's View, the "woman's film" genre is rather difficult to pin down to a specific plot line or characterization. "Women's films" as noted by Basinger, are generally films from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s featuring women stars in stories about women. They cut across drama, comedy, musical and melodrama and appear in romance, suspense, horror, science fiction and other types of stories. But the common element seems to be strength. "The American woman on film is not a weak creature. She may have weaknesses, and it can bring her down; she may be confused and worried, which will cause her to make foolish mistakes;

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50 For example: Berry; S. Bruzzi, Undressing the Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies, (New York: Routledge, 1997); S.P. Pritchard, Film Costume: An Annotated Bibliography, (N.J.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1981); S. Schreier, Hollywood Dressed and Undressed: A Century of Cinema Style, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1998).

51 In Screen Style, author Sara Berry discussed varied influences feature films had on the consumer audience in the 1930s. She concentrates on transmission of style as well as marketing of products like cosmetics and clothing lines through movie magazines or in-film product promotion. Veronica Dierker, The Relationship of Influences of the Hollywood Film Industry to the Fashion Industry During the 1920s through the Early 1940s, (unpublished Master's Thesis; University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1979). Dierker discussed primarily transmission of style through stars, influence of costume designers on apparel as well as other influences from Hollywood on American fashion.

but she is not weak and she is not stupid."[52] The woman was seldom an idler or living off funds from wealthy parents. She was working, usually toward a goal that had nothing to do with a man or marriage. She was independent or striving for independence.

Ironically, this genre depicting strong, independent women emerged, at least partially, as a result of restrictive guidelines imposed on Hollywood by the Hayes Office. "Under threat from the Hayes Office, women [on screen] were no longer able to languish in satin on a chaise lounge and subsist on passion; they were forced to do something, and a whole generation of working women came into being."[53] This is not to say that Hollywood "created" the working American woman. Hollywood illustrated a growing trend.

Prior to A Women's View, a series of works emerged which examined images and portrayals of women and women's lives in Hollywood films of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. The first of these was Popcorn Venus published in 1973. In the opening chapter, Marjorie Rosen points out that while critical analysis of film had, up to that point, encompassed a wide range of topics including Westerns, directors, blacks, Hollywood myths, gossip and legends, women's roles and presence was largely ignored.[54] In the same year From Reverence to Rape by Molly Haskell was published.[55] As the first scholarly works to examine women in film, these two sources are among the most cited in literature about women's films. Organized along the decades, each of their examinations covered literally hundreds of films over sixty years of filmmaking. Women's films are also included in studies that look at this genre as

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[52] Jeanine Basinger, A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 24.
[53] Molly Haskell, From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 31.
[54] Marjorie Rosen, Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream, (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 13.
[55] Haskell, 31.

part of a broader examination of women in the media. Examples include Ann Hollander's Feeding the Eye, Susan J. Douglas' Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media, and Stewart and Elizabeth Ewen's Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness.[56] While several films I propose to examine in this study were mentioned throughout these various works in the general context of women's films, only A Women's View discussed the fashion industry, with comments limited to the use of department stores in film.[57] No one has yet examined the depiction of the fashion industry or the fashion designer. While scholarly examination of the apparel industry as portrayed by the motion picture industry is limited, investigation of various other industries or professions portrayed in motions pictures is prolific. For example, scholars have examined such professions portrayed in film as journalists, schoolteachers, lawyers, artists, cowboys, clergy, even gangsters.[58]

Literary Criticism and Scholarship

Fiction and literature portraying the garment worker and the apparel industry has achieved scholarly attention. This body of work focuses on the apparel industry as it appears

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[56] Ann Hollander, Feeding the Eye, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999) NOTE: Hollander has also authored several other works examining film, fashion and the audience including Sex and Suits, Moving Pictures and Seeing Through Clothes; Susan J. Douglas, Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media, (New York: Time Books, 1994); Stewart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness, (Minneapolis, M.N.: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

[57] Basinger's brief examination of the department store in women's films is discussed later in this document.

[58] Richard R. Ness, Film and the Fourth Estate: The Journalism Film as Genre, (Unpublished Master's Thesis, ISU, Ames, IA, 1991); Howard Good , Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism and the Movies, (Lanham, M.D.: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Alex Barris, Stop the Presses! The Newspaperman in American Film, (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes, 1976); Pamela B. Joseph, and Gail E. Burnaford, ed., Images of Schoolteachers in America, (N.J.: Erlbaum Assoc., 2001); Anthony Chase, Movies on Trial: The Legal System on the Silver Screen, (New York: New Press, 2002); John A. Walker, Art and Artists on the Screen, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1993); Buck Rainey, The Reel Cowboy: Essays on the Myth in Movies and Literature, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1996); Barbara Keyser and Les Keyser, Hollywood and the Catholic Church: The Image of Roman Catholicism in American Movies, (I.L.: Loyola University Press, 1984); Marilyn Yaquinto, Pump 'em Full of Lead: A Look at the Gangsters on Film, (New York: Prentice Hall International, 1998).

in fictional literature and short stories.[59] These examinations encompassed the early part of the twentieth century and discussed stories of seamstresses, factory workers and union efforts. The stories reviewed focused primarily on wage-earning women. Nan Enstad, in her book Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure, contended that popular culture elements such as fiction, the press and nickel movies played a viable role in the lives of young immigrant factory women in shaping self-image as young Americans and her connection to fashion and dress.[60]

"Fashion Designer" as a New Professional Title

Emerging from roots in dressmaking or costume design, the term *fashion designer* represented a revised image and function of this profession. It is unclear when exactly this new term came into use. Social historian Mary Donahue claimed the term "fashion designer" did not appear until "well into the 1950s."[61] However, Louise Barnes Gallagher, dubbed by Milbank as among the first crop of real American designers in the New York market, penned a novel published in 1940 entitled Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer.[62] Hattie Carnegie was described around the same time by a Chicago tabloid as a "leading fashion designer."[63] Clearly, this term was in use prior to World War II.

The term fashion designer means a person who designs fashionable clothing for women, both mature and young. Unlike dressmakers, costume designers and ladies' tailors,

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[59] Amal Amireh, The Factory Girl and the Seamstress: Imaging Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century American Fiction, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000); Lara Hapke, Tales of the Working Girl: Wage-Earning Women in American Literature, 1890-1925, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992); Laura Hapke, Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work and Fiction in the 1930s, (London: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

[60] Nan Enstad, Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[61] Donahue, 107.

[62] Milbank, 100; Louise Barnes Gallagher, Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1940).

[63] M.D.C. Crawford, The Ways of Fashion, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1941), 235.

fashion designers did not (and still do not) work directly with clients or provide any sort of personal service. In fact, it became a challenge of the working fashion designer to know the client through research or other means in order to meet product needs most appropriately.[64] The job of the fashion designer entailed (and still does) the creative and technical design functions of garment development, through sketching or rendering communication, and also through draping or fabric manipulation in an experimental or artistic manner. There is evidence that aspects of pattern development for production and cutting were left to others.[65] This term may serve to delineate a new division of labor present in the ready-made/ready-to-wear industry, somewhat different from that in the costume designer/dressmaker/ladies' tailor trade. It appears as though a fashion designer for manufacturing evolved to embody the creative and experimental aspects of product development, shedding away some of the mundane or manual tasks of actual cutting and sewing that a dressmaker may have executed. Milbank defined the real beginning of the American fashion movement as the mid 1930s, which is about the time we see this new term fashion designer emerge into various popular culture formats.[66]

The Fashion Designer in Popular Culture

Career Literature for Fashion Design

Fashion career literature targeted to women reflected these trends. General career information for women had been published for decades earlier than the 1930s. Often not more than a chapter was dedicated to the apparel industry and its various opportunities for

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[64] Gertrude Cain, Designing the American Way, (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1950), 7.
[65] As early as 1912, at least one publication indicated that a separation of function existed between the "designer" who offered the creative and technical design functions of the process, and the "foreman" who offered the technical and mechanical expertise to make the designs producible. The Clothing Designer – "Devoted to the Art of Clothes Making" began publication in June, 1912.
[66] Milbank, 100.

women.[67] However, by the 1930s, various fashion industry insiders began to publish handbooks specifically focused on the fashion industry that provided guidance to young women seeking any one of a number of careers in fashion. Career information for the fashion designer occupied at most a chapter within the given volume, offering varied information about what the job entailed, and what, if any, type of education was necessary. There seems to be an inherent contradiction in this information. While educational institutions were listed and promoted, qualifications revolved around natural ability and exquisite personal taste. One book even proposed the idea that the work ethic of a small town girl was much preferred over that of a city girl.[68] One of the earliest books to specifically describe design was published in 1940 and was part of a series of self-study books by The Home Institute encompassing a wide array of career options to be mastered through study at home. Entitled Dress Designing for a Smart Career, this text was authored by Ruth Hutton, a faculty member at Cooper Union, a design school in New York.[69]

The Fashion Designer in the Popular Press

American fashion designers began to receive recognition by name in the popular press throughout the 1930s. By the end of World War II the American designer had been promoted to the status of a celebrity through a number of orchestrated promotional efforts. While historians have identified and examined this trend in promotion of the fashion designer during the World War II period, little notice is taken of the promotional support that specific

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[67] e.g. Anna Steese Richardson, The Girl Who Earns Her Own Living, (New York: B.W. Dodge & Company, 1909), 46-73; Florence McGowen, "Designing, A Vocation for College Women," in Careers for Women, ed. Catherine Filene, (New York.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 57-59; Charles Richards, Art in Industry, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922), 11-46; Training for the Professions and Allied Occupations: Facilities Available to Women in the United States, (New York: Bureau of Vocational Information, 1924), 94-102.
[68] Catherine Oglesby, Fashion Careers American Style, (New York: Funk & Wagnall's Company, 1937), 62.
[69] Ruth Hutton, Dress Designing for a Smart Career, (Home Institute, Inc., 1940), 3.

designers received in the 1930s. It is commonly believed, in fact, that designers worked in complete anonymity until the onset of World War II and the suppression of Paris fashion communication under Nazi occupation.[70] While it is true that designers rarely enjoyed seeing their names on the labels of the garments they designed until the World War II era, their names, design directions and sometimes the companies they worked for were promoted via the popular press and through a number of trade organizations throughout the 1930s.

The number of books and other works on fashion designers is vast. The majority, however, frankly exist in the realm of colorful coffee table books. Many are hardly more than page after page of large, glossy images of beautiful garments in oversized books "which people use to give their sitting rooms a fashionable feel."[71] Several provide information on who was designing during the various eras of the twentieth century and provide extensive visual examples of garments.[72] In terms of historical information on the designers, each decade tends be examined separately with a summary treatment of the highlights.

The Fashion Designer in Career Fiction

A genre called "career fiction" began to appear in the 1930s and continued throughout the twentieth century. A number of publishing houses, such as Dodd, Mead and Company, Avalon and Random House published fictional accounts of young women working in various professions and industries and these books were targeted directly to young readers. Kathleen Reuter Chamberlain, in her article "Every Girl's Ambition: Careers

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[70] Buckland, 39.
[71] Ian Griffiths, "The Invisible Man," in The Fashion Business: Theory, Practice and Image, ed. by Nicola White and Ian Griffiths. (New York: Berg, 2000), 83.
[72] For example: Charlotte Seeling, Fashion: The Century of the Designer, (Cologne, Germany: Konemann, 1999); Caroline Rennolds Milbank, New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1989); Valerie Steele, Women of Fashion: Twentieth Century Designers, (New York: Rizzoli, 1991).

in Girls' Series Fiction, 1940-1970" points out that, due to the fact that marriage was a "blur on the horizon of the future" of these young readers, it was not addressed seriously in these stories. Young girls had an opportunity to explore career options through fiction without marriage and family obligations as an obstacle.[73] While several publishers offered these stories to their young readers, Dodd Mead took the idea one step further. The Dodd Mead publications were actually authored (often with the help of a second writer) by people who worked in the industry depicted in the story.[74] Louise Barnes Gallagher, noted designer of the 1930s, authored a series of these career novels for Dodd, Mead and Company; Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer, Mary Bray, Fashion Designer, and Buttons and Beaux.[75] The Dodd, Mead series often featured aspects of the career such as necessary education, work environment, work process and skills as well as potential earnings and promotion.

The Fashion Designer in Motion Pictures

To a limited extent, film historians have commented upon aspects of film depiction of the garment industry. Throughout the twentieth century, film depictions centered on different aspects of the industry. In Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America, author Steven J. Ross commented on the plight of women seamstresses, mill workers and immigrant pieceworkers as depicted in silent film. Women in this profession were presented far from glamorously, with themes consistently revolving around poor,

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[73] Kathleen Reuter Chamberlain, "Every Girl's Ambition: Careers in Girls' Series Fiction, 1940-1970," Dime Novel Roundup, December 1991, 106-111.
[74] Eleanor Mikucki, "Help Wanted, Female: Career Books," Authors and Books for Children, 21 August 2001 < http://www.elliemik.com/helpwanted.html> (Retrieved 25 August 2003).
[75] Louise Barnes Gallagher, Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer, (New York: Dodd Mead, 1940); Mary Bray, Fashion Designer, (New York: Dodd Mead, 1945); with Wyndham Lee, Buttons and Beaux, (New York: Dodd Mead, 1953).

unsafe working conditions and multiple forms of sexual harassment.[76] The department store began to appear in film as early as 1916 but in 1927, with the release of It, starring Clara Bow as an all-too-adorable lingerie sales clerk in a posh department store, the fashion theme shifted. Consumerism continued to develop and define America, with the department store at the forefront. So it is not surprising that from 1916 to 1955, over thirty motion pictures were produced portraying the department store as a locus for exciting, glamorous stories. Sub themes included romance, success and greed. Plots depicted "the palace of consumption as a setting for a wide range of female fantasies about work and love, success and fulfillment, depicting department store selling as a richly varied cultural terrain....These films...helped to take the department store out of the workday world and give it a place in a woman's dreams."[77]

The department store held a dominant place in society during this era. Basinger discusses the success of these films in creating a microcosm of the world, with people of all educational and socio-economic backgrounds either working or shopping.[78] Department stores were a major employer of women, offering varied opportunities and unequalled advancement compared to factory, domestic or clerical work.[79] In Counter Cultures, Benson proposed that these film depictions and glamorization had an impact on women as to the desirability of working in a department store.[80] Women worked outside the home primarily in nursing, teaching, domestic, clerical, factory or retail jobs during this era. Women portrayed on the silver screen, living and working amid the busy glamour of the department

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[76] Steven J. Ross, Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Reshaping of Class in America, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 49-51.
[77] Benson, 215.
[78] Basinger, 227
[79] Benson, 190
[80] Benson, 215

store and succeeding in higher level positions of authority exposed young women to new and different career options and did so in a most appealing manner.

Amid the theme of the department store a new apparel industry scenario emerged -- the world and work of the fashion designer. Throughout the twentieth century over 100 films were produced depicting the American fashion designer. While the latter decades of the twentieth century saw an upsurge of the fashion designer presentation, the first of these films appeared in the 1930s.

Subject to a formulaic Hollywood plot line and restrictions from the Hayes office, most of the women depicted in classic Hollywood films eventually married the male hero, which on the surface appeared to undermine the image of independence or glamour of this profession. However, weighing the impact of a film solely on the ending casts a shadow over other elements in the aesthetic, plot and story line which are also relevant to what it both contributes and reflects.[81] Many of these films were either written by women screenwriters or based on novels written by women authors.

Ideas and images portrayed in popular culture were largely constructions of the social and economic conditions of their time. Women's roles in the workplace and society changed and expanded throughout the whole of the twentieth century. These changes spurred activity, discussion, even controversy. The reality of economic conditions imposed by war, affluence, depression and protectionism also prompted change and adjusted perspectives. By placing this analysis in the context of the larger social and economic conditions of the 1930s, a better

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[81] In her book The Souls of the Skyscraper, which examined the lives and influences of ranks of female clerical workers in Chicago from 1870-1930, author Lisa M. Fine studied films and other popular cultural influences on the image of the clerical worker. In many ways these perspectives are applicable to like depictions of women who work in other gendered professions, such as fashion. Additionally, in his article "The Two Joes Meet -- Joe College and Joe Veteran," author Daniel A. Clark pointed out the depiction of college life in popular culture, especially advertisements and feature films, as a part of the democratization of education in post-War America.

understanding of the American fashion designer as she was portrayed in popular culture during this era can develop.

CHAPTER THREE

CAREER LITERATURE: NON-FICTION AND FICTION

Throughout the 1930s, apparel industry professions were promoted as potential career options through a wide array of career literature. These publications were generated in various formats by a host of constituencies, including industry trade groups, educational associations and general publishing houses that targeted the young reader. Fashion career literature focused on the promotion of fashion journalism, professional styling, merchandising, advertising and product or apparel design. This information was distributed in the form of speech reprints and proceedings, association literature generated for trade group members, and books distributed directly to young readers. Interestingly, this information was presented in both non-fiction and fiction formats and was aimed almost entirely at a female audience.[1] The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the world and work of the fashion designer was constructed for this audience of young female readers through these publications, and to examine the factors leading to this promotional construction.

Unemployment escalated for the first three years of the Depression. According to Alice Kessler-Harris, four and a half million people were out of work in 1930, almost doubling to eight million by 1931. By 1932 almost thirteen million people were jobless,

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[1] Mary Donahue, "Design and the Industrial Arts in America, 1894-1940: An Inquiry into Fashion Design and Art and Industry" (Ph. D. diss., The City University of New York, 2001). Throughout her thesis, Donahue built a case that fashion design, for a variety of reasons, was targeted specifically to young women. In Chapter 7, Donahue specifically addressed career literature, providing an accounting of various works published during this era. Her focus was fashion design as a career promoted to women as a potential profession through these publications.

representing one fourth of the entire workforce.[2] Why then such promising, if not aggressive, recruitment of employees into the fashion industry? Catherine Oglesby offered one explanation:

> With employment at a low ebb, the jobs that women are going to get are the jobs that men don't want. That's not propaganda. It's common sense. Modern gallants are pretty unanimously agreed that women may still continue to queen it over typewriters, file cabinets and telephones. There's one other field in which they pass the palm to ladies....Fashions. Thank your lucky stars, then, that you want to get into fashions, for time and tide are with you.[3]

Career literature indicated that availability of jobs in the fashion industry seemed to be due, in part, to gender stereotypes regarding fashion as a female profession.

Upon exploring both fiction and non-fiction literature specifically related to the fashion designer, I found key themes which emerged in the written discussion of this profession. These included descriptions of the designer's work, necessary and preferred levels of education, training and other qualifications; and information on salary, perquisites and benefits for the various categories of professional apparel design. By examining these identified themes from career literature, written over a ten year period, I hope to provide a better understanding of the portrayal of fashion design as a profession in the 1930s as a representation of constructions of women's roles.

Non-Fiction Career Literature

The Work of the Designer

The phrase "fashion designer" surfaced around the mid-1930s and seemed to serve as an umbrella term used to describe several different types of designers. The industry was deeply fragmented and a number of initiatives during the early part of the twentieth century

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[2] Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 250.
[3] Catherine Oglesby, Fashion Careers American Style, (New York: Funk and Wagnall Co., 1935/1937), 6.

attempted to remedy this. Women's Wear Daily, then known as Women's Wear, provided comprehensive reporting on industry news. Trade associations formed including The Fashion Group, which promoted advanced professionalism among fashion executives, and educational guidance and opportunities to young women. Pattern companies and magazines promoted fashion and good taste to school-age girls and college women through lectures, publications and design contests.[4] During the 1930s, the fashion industry was promoted as a new and expanding business and the profession of "fashion designer" included various functions of this new business. In its broadest definition, fashion design referred to "the creation of original styles in all kinds of clothes and accessories worn by men, women and children."[5] The job titles of costume designer (in this case, not for the theater but refered to design of formal gowns and ensembles most likely worn for social occasions), wholesale designer, retail designer, and "Hollywood" and stage designer were included under this umbrella of fashion designers. Also designers of knitwear, millinery, lingerie, handbag, glove and accessories, along with a host of apprentice-level and support positions such as assistant designers, sketchers, copyists, illustrators, sample hands, freelancers and stylists were sometimes included.[6]

Career literature throughout the 1930s described the work of design professionals and how the function of the designer varied within each setting. Basically, two different business configurations existed – the designer who retailed his or her own goods directly to the customer was know as a *retail designer* or *designing retailer,* and the designer who designed for mass production was a *wholesale designer*. These two business configurations actually

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[4] Gertrude Warburton and Jane Maxwell, Fashion for a Living, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1939), 6.
[5] Careers in Fashion Designing, (Chicago, I.L.: The Institute for Research, 1940), 1.
[6] Careers in Fashion Designing, 3.

took their shape prior to the 1930s. The retail designer was rooted in the traditions of the American dressmaker and the Paris couture, directly serving clients with custom-made apparel and exclusive ready-to-wear clothing, millinery and accessories. The wholesale designer emerged as a new profession with the ongoing development of manufactured ready-to-wear in the United States. These two business models served as the standard throughout the 1930s; however importance and practicality shifted as changes took place in the development of ready-to-wear clothing.

The Retail Designer

Charles R. Richards directed a study in 1920, published in 1922, entitled Art in Industry. This investigation focused on various careers requiring artistic talent, evaluating the need for specific training. In the "Costumes" section, the career areas of custom dressmaking/model making and wholesale dressmaking were described; each of these employed "designers."

Custom dressmaking or *model making* referred to the creation of fine "costumes" for women, using a high degree of artistry. Original development was present in the highest grade businesses, with less and less originality and more reliance on French designs at the lower grade firms. This type of establishment was referred to later as a "retail house" and provided exclusive service to clients.[7] Depending on the grade of the establishment, designers were often employed by the firm to ensure development of a consistent design direction. But more often the designer was the owner.[8] A *styler* served as the editor of the collection and provided the overall creative direction of the business. According to this

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[7] Charles R. Richards, Art in Industry (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922), 19.
[8] Costume Design as an Occupation, (New York: Federated Council on Art Education and the Institute of Women's Professional Relations, 1936), 33; Ruth Hutton, Dress Designing for a Smart Career, (Home Institute, Inc., 1940), 34-35.

study, the styler may have been the owner or other principal in the firm and may or may not also have been a designer. Only lower end or budget businesses were inclined to purchase designs from *free lance designers*. Beginners sometimes sought free lance design opportunities as one way to gain experience and work their way into a permanent position with a firm. Once models were accepted into the line by the styler, a *sketcher,* often employed by the establishment, sketched a copy of the design for recordkeeping. Designers, according to this study, primarily worked through the creative process of developing design ideas by draping, pinning and cutting on a human figure, and sketching was a separate job, not necessarily a creative function of the process.[9]

Career literature throughout the 1930s continued to define design work within the context of either the retail designer or wholesale designer. Designing retailers were described as designing "Paris style"[10]or "after the French manner."[11] Each designer maintained an establishment housing their design operations and retail businesses, supervised both the business and the creative affairs, employed a staff of professional craft and business personnel who executed the designer's ideas, and developed the products to a salable format.[12] The physical establishment was an integral part of the business of a designing retailer. Location in a "fashionable" district and distinct interior decoration were important marketing tools. These two factors were consistently described about the designer and were as much a part of the retail designer's professional persona as the apparel products. These establishments often included private showrooms and a salon merchandising a line of ready-

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[9] Richards, 12-13.
[10] Oglesby, 93.
[11] Costume Design as a Profession, (New London, C.T.: R.L. Denison, 1936,) 11.
[12] Grace Ely, American Fashion Designers, (New York: National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1935), 15.

to-wear clothing, hats and accessories. If a patron wished to make a purchase from a retail designer, a trip to the designer's establishment was a necessity.

Designs were highly inspired and relied on a great deal of artistry and craftsmanship. Repeatedly designers insisted that fabric, its color and how it performed, provided the basis of inspiration for original designs. Even though originality and quality were touted as uppermost, Paris continued to be lauded as the leader of style. But a few downgraded its importance. Fiffi, a designer during this era, was quoted more than once with this motto. "Clothes do not inspire clothes, but life and people, interpreted through the designer's art, do."[13]

Depending on the background, training, personality and work style of each designer, the creative and development process varied along a continuum. Their roles ranged from design director and business manager to responsibility for the actual hands-on execution of each garment. Some designers sketched ideas, while others designed through a process of draping and cutting. For instance, Muriel King was described as taking more of an artists approach to the design process, sketching an idea for a client based on the lines and color most appropriate for that individual and then handing the rendering off to a team of "tailors, dressmakers and fitters to work out the finished garment."[14] It is important to note that in the career literature, this team of craftsmen and women were left unnamed and unidentified. Other designers, such as Fiffi and Elizabeth Hawes, cut, draped and executed an original design to a semi-finished state before entrusting it to an unnamed group of patternmakers, cutters and finishers for final execution.[15] Custom apparel, of course required a number of

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[13] Ely, 11; Costume Design as an Occupation, 31.
[14] Ely, 15.
[15] Ely, 10, 13.

fitting sessions with the client. Participation in the fitting sessions and other customer contact by the designer also varied depending upon the work style of the designer, the configuration of the company and the status of the client. Some retail designers developed exclusive garments for individual clients, while others designed seasonal collections from which customers made their selections. In this case, the garments were then tailored to the personal fitting needs of the individual client with flexibility for fabric choice and other changes to suit the specific needs of the individual. Along this continuum, businesses catering to an exclusive clientele which provided custom-made apparel followed the traditional Paris business model.[16] Designers after the Paris business model used their own name as the company title, secured substantial real estate to operate the business, served as principal business leader and performed more than a design function by engaging in the risks and responsibilities required of starting and maintaining a viable business. In addition to developing beautiful, salable designs, these business leaders were faced with paying rent, capital investment to purchase both workroom equipment and supplies, weekly payroll, advertising, personnel decisions, sales, and the development of a following of those wealthy enough to pay their bills and influential enough to generate interest and excitement in the line. In addition to "designer," designing retailers also carried the titles of "saleswoman, executive and organizer."[17]

By 1936, designing retailers or *exclusive dressmaking establishments* continued to operate in New York City and a few other larger cities. Design positions were reported, however, as more limited than in previous years, with only a very few assistant and student

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[16] Oglesby 93-94.
[17] Oglesby, 94-95.

apprentice opportunities available for young beginners. When one manufacturer-designer was asked about further opportunities in design, she responded, "...not in dressmaking; it doesn't fit into our era. This is the machine age, and manufacture can now produce as varied and as beautiful clothes as there is any demand for."[18]

The Wholesale Designer

Wholesale designers worked under a different business configuration. Instead of stemming from the traditions of Paris dressmaking, the wholesale design business model was forged from the requirements and conditions of the mass produced ready-to-wear industry. In 1920, Catherine Filene edited Careers for Women, an expansion of her graduate thesis at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, which focused on a variety of career fields for college educated women. This volume consisted of a series of interviews with women working in a variety of occupations.[19] Under the heading "Arts and Crafts," Filene included an interview/chapter written by Florence McGowan, a designer for Joseph A. Morris & Company, in New York. In her section entitled Designing, A Vocation for College Women, McGowan explained the specifics of being a designer for a large manufacturing establishment. In 1920 McGowan held the title of "designer" in this particular setting, rather than "dressmaker." McGowan described the job of a designer in 1920 as follows:

> ...planning the model for a garment in detail and doing everything in the way of preparation for the actual making of it. The designer's work depends in part upon the size and grade of the house where she is employed, upon the number of sample

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[18] Costume Design as a Profession, 29.

[19] "Women Working, 1870-1930," Harvard University Library Open Collections Program, 2004, http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/people_shouse.html> (Retrieved 15 June 2004). In 1929, Catherine Filene founded the *Institute of Women's Professional Relations*, an organization devoted to providing information and career support to women with education past the high school level. This organizations co-published career literature for fashion design, also reviewed in this section.

> hands she has to assist her in carrying out her ideas, and upon the number of models she is expected to turn out each week.[20]

McGowan provided very few specific details about the designer's work, allowing for her assertion that qualifications were primarily "nothing more than putting this natural interest in planning models for gowns and frocks on a professional basis."[21] Ideal training, according to McGowan, was a college education and an innate understanding and love of clothes.[22] A college education in McGowan's narrative was not described as any more than that. She did not specify a degree or area of training; art or home economics. Nor did she specify a type of college or school (trade or liberal arts).

In 1922, in Art in Industry it was pointed out that in *wholesale dressmaking* designers were employed by manufacturers. Both original work and copies of the best offerings of the retail businesses fed the steady demand for new designs. Imitation ran rampant, with copies acquired from Paris, a growing number from the American retail houses and, later, Hollywood. In fact, copying was in many ways its own separate and organized branch of the apparel industry. Some manufacturers employed people to copy, or *copyists*, while other manufacturers purchased copies from business established solely on the premise of copying. Many Paris houses sold the patterns and the copyrights of their designs to American manufacturers for the purpose of reproduction but many more copies were pirated, or copied without express permission from the originator. One unnamed designer interviewed explained her job as a copyist in Paris:

> In Paris I got a job as a saleswoman in a copying house. The copyists get hold of every idea they can anywhere, and sell muslin patterns or copies in materials. I

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[20] Francis McGowan, "Designing, A Vocation for College Women," in Careers for Women, ed. Catherine Filene (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 57.
[21] McGowan, 57.
[22] McGowan, 57.

> made patterns and copies and I sold. I lived on $35 a month, $20 from the copy house and $15 from the sketches which I sold to American buyers.[23]

Copyists also worked in American manufacturing. An ad for a copyist reprinted in one career guide read as follows: "Debutante and young society woman, with entry to finest New York couturiers; good shopper; to design for high grade concern."[24] American *design studios* functioned much like Paris copy houses. This type of business did not manufacture any type of apparel except in sample form, and generated ideas from any number of sources. Sketches and sample garments were sold to businesses for production. *Model houses* worked in a similar manner but designs were promoted as entirely original, produced in the form of sketches or sample garments. In the model houses, each design was different and sold to manufacturing houses for purposes of mass production with the agreement that the model house would never repeat that design for another client's use.[25] This was one method for obtaining designs by manufacturers that cut personnel costs by not employing full time designers.

Garments were designed specifically for ready-to-wear and were not sold directly to the customer. Instead, the garments reached the consumer through department stores and other retail clothing establishments. Manufacturers and designers marketed their latest style offerings to the retail buyer through the showroom.[26] Wholesale designers designed for a large population and did not have benefit of the individual contact with clients enjoyed by the designing retailers. According to one account, fear of piracy of original designs supposedly created a need for a shielding veil to be placed over these wholesale designers, securing their

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[23] Costume Design as an Occupation, 10.
[24] Choosing a Life Career in the Design Arts, (New York: National Alliance of Art and Industry, 1932), 16.
[25] Ruth Hutton, Dress Designing for a Smart Career, (Home Institute, Inc., 1940), 37.
[26] Ely, 22, a reprint of: Virginia Pope, "Behind the Easter Parade of Fashion," The New York Times Magazine, 21 April 1935.

anonymity from the public and the exclusivity of their designs until ready for sale. The name of the manufacturer, not the designer, was placed on the label. This type of design for the wholesale mass produced ready-to-wear market was referred to by Catherine Oglesby as "design American style."[27] She described this type of designer's work as follows:

> A new course has been charted out by younger American women who have aspired to triumphs in this field....The enormous billion-dollar ready-to-wear trade, which hustles along in America ... has created a new type of designer – the designer who gives all her energy to creative work and has no call to be a business executive, organizer or retail saleslady....These designers have no fashionable establishments of their own. They never see retail customers, and they have no rent to pay or payrolls to meet.[28]

This statement is true in part. Ideally, the expansion of ready-to-wear opened up a number of opportunities for designers who focused primarily on product development, leaving other functions of business management to the owners and principals. But, according to accounts provided in the career literature, at least some individuals recognized as the designers also owned their own wholesale firms. Hattie Carnegie straddled the line between designing retailer and wholesale designer, producing both kinds of apparel for both types of consumer. By 1935 she was reported to operate, in addition to three retail shops providing made-to-order and ready-to-wear clothing, two wholesale businesses and the factories to support the necessary production.[29] One author in 1933 claimed that both retail and wholesale designs for her label were designed entirely by assistants.[30] Other wholesale designer/owners included Carol, Helen Cookman, Jo Copeland, Pauline Fields, G. Howard Hodge, Kivette, Germaine Monteil and Nettie Rosenstein.[31] Each of these designers headed

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[27] Oglesby, 96.
[28] Oglesby, 96, 98.
[29] Ely, 9.
[30] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," Fortune, December 1933, 140.
[31] Ely, 9-33.

both the business and creative functions of their wholesale firms and employed a team to design and execute the apparel products. The reported design processes were similar to those described in the literature for the designing retailers. Wholesale designers used combinations of design techniques including draping and sketching depending upon their individual background and work style.

While the most successful retail designers described throughout the literature worked in New York, some in Chicago and an unmentioned few in California, wholesale designers could find work in a number of America's larger cities. Seventh Avenue was proclaimed by many as the center of the garment industry, but Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Kansas City, Dallas, San Francisco and Los Angeles were also centers of clothing production and, thus, offered opportunities for designers. Literature concentrated on working in the New York industry, so the outlying manufacturing centers were more or less referred to as a springboard to working in a New York firm. But not all designers aspired to the New York industry. Designers were needed to help develop outlying manufacturing settings and many worked out their entire careers helping to build the reputation of each of these centers.

Rather than designing entire wardrobes, designers in wholesale garment manufacturing specialized in one type of garment, such as coats, day dresses, evening dresses, sportswear or knits. Manufacturing and design was segmented even further, as firms specialized in consumer categories such as misses, junior miss or children's. Manufacturers also produced garments within a prescribed price level. This meant the designer was challenged to execute not only salable garments but to use fabrics, trims and workmanship that kept the final wholesale price within the manufacturer's specialized level and still

provide a profit. The wholesale designer was required to be practical and adaptable with regard to interpreting inspiration sources into apparel.[32]

Price levels also created opportunity in the design profession. For example, a designer not only specialized in, for example, day dresses, but in day dresses produced within a certain wholesale price level. Career movement and increased pay, therefore could occur by moving from employment with a manufacturer specializing in low to moderate priced day dresses to a manufacturer specializing in higher priced day dresses.[33]

The designer "sourced" materials, developed relationships with both source vendors and retail buyers, and calculated costs of the garments in terms of both materials and work hours. Often, the wholesale designer did not personally perform those functions, but managed his or her work through a staff of assistants. In Costume Design as an Occupation, the function of the designer was described in these terms:

> At the top the designer is a partner or has her own business. This calls for ability to organize work and handle the workers; for financial sense; and for skill in buying and selling; for ability to make decisions, to accept responsibility, to be discreet in handling trade secrets. Self-confidence is always necessary whether early in the game in handling costly materials or later in making business decisions. Ability to criticize constructively both one's own work and that of assistants is important.[34]

Mass appeal posed further design challenges. Garments had to sell in volume, appealing to a wide variety of women across a large geographical range. And they had to sell twice; first to the retail buyer and then to the consumer. This brought about a greater importance to the role of the *stylist*. This was a newer profession along the continuum of

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[32] McGowan, 58; NOTE: Wholesale prices were categorized as follows: Low-end goods – below $15 per item wholesale; medium-priced goods - $15-$27.50 per item wholesale; high-end goods – above $27.50 per item wholesale. Source: Kyle Crichton, "Dress Parade," Collier's, 11 April 1936, 50.
[33] Costume Design as an Occupation, 25.
[34] Costume Design as an Occupation, 35.

fashion jobs, and not altogether unlike the "styler" described in earlier fashion career literature. The stylist's function was to gauge demand and predict what the public would buy, operating very much like a modern day merchandiser or market researcher.[35]

Working conditions in manufacturing were described as far less appealing than those of the exclusive dressmaking establishments. While the retail designers occupied upscale retail space with distinct, elegant, interesting interior decoration schemes, workspace for the wholesale designer was described as a corner of the noisy factory floor. Private offices and studios were perks reserved for those designers who had achieved a level of success in their field.

By the late 1930s, The Fashion Group, among its many functions, offered career guidance for those pursuing any number of fashion careers. A collection of speeches given at The Fashion Group's training courses was published in 1938. How the Fashion World Works: Fit Yourself for a Fashion Future featured the remarks of a number of noted fashion professionals, speaking on their areas of expertise.[36] Discussion of design as a profession was limited to the wholesale field. Speakers shared their own experiences in their various apparel, accessory and kindred jobs, some describing their backgrounds and how they got started in the business. They also offered advice to young people and provided an educational presentation on some aspect of their work, such as color analysis, marketing, etc. These speakers were positioned as experts in the wholesale industry, promoting apparel and related goods as a highly skilled, professional level undertaking. Retail designers were not discussed and were not included among the guest speakers.

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[35] Costume Design as an Occupation, 12-13.
[36] Margaretta Stevenson, How the Fashion World Works: Fit Yourself for a Fashion Future, (New York: Harper and Brother Publishers, 1938).

The Hollywood Designer

Another type of designer identified in career literature was the *Hollywood designer*. As the name implies, *Hollywood designers* created garments for the actresses in the very popular and growing motion picture industry located in Hollywood, California. Their primary function was to create apparel for the screen, or "costumes" in the more modern meaning of the word. But with nationwide and international distribution of American movies, these designers were coming to the forefront as a force in mainstream American design during this era. Hollywood stories were becoming more realistic and, in turn, so were the costumes worn by the actors. By Gilbert Adrian's account, a gown featured in a motion picture received more exposure in one evening, in one theater alone than the same gown could receive through other established fashion promotional channels.[37] And the designs were original. Due to motion picture production constraints, copying or adapting Paris was out of the question for these designers. As a result, an original approach to costuming actresses was born. Gilbert Adrian explains why:

> For purely mechanical reasons we have to launch rather than merely reflect fashion....A month after a French gown is shown in New York, or published in your magazine, the copies begin to flood the land. Our pictures are not released until three or four months after they are started. If I took a dress already popular, and copied it in a picture, ladies in the audience might already be wearing copies of it and the whole film would appear to them passé.[38]

While some Hollywood designers worked exclusively under contract with the Hollywood studios, several developed lucrative followings outside the motion picture industry. For example, in the 1930s Gilbert Adrian at MGM dressed Joan Crawford and Norma Shearer off the screen as well as on; Travis Banton with Paramount dressed Carole

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[37] Adrian, "Do American Women Want American Clothes," reprinted in Ely, 36.
[38] Adrian, reprinted in Ely, 36.

Lombard, Joan Bennett and Claudette Colbert; Howard Greer not only dressed actresses off the screen, but he developed a noted off-stage clientele and wholesaled clothing in stores in New York and Chicago.[39] Often Hollywood designs were as copied as those in Paris or New York.[40]

While the authors of career literature often highlighted the grandiose, glamorous side of designing for the stage and screen, there were others who warned young, aspiring designers off this career path. Kivette, a theatrical designer turned wholesaler, considered the field overcrowded.[41] Irene Sharaff, noted Broadway designer, confirmed this sentiment. In the busiest Broadway season, about 17 of the 97 productions required the services of a costume designer, with the lion's share commissioned to one or two of the most highly regarded designers.[42] Hollywood's opportunities were reported equally bleak for the beginner. An elite few designers under studio contract dressed most of the films, and for those pictures where the services of outside designers were desired, those with established reputations from New York or Paris were contracted.[43]

Other Opportunities in Fashion Design

As early as the 1930s, designers were at the top of the industry hierarchy, whether for retail, wholesale or Hollywood. There were myriad other positions, however, below the status of the designer that fed into the workings of the system and helped groom future

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[39] Ely, 37-39.
[40] Sara Berry, Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood, (Minneapolis, M.N.: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Veronica Dierker, "The Relationship and Influences of the Hollywood Film Industry to the Fashion Industry During the 1920s through the 1940s," (Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin – Madison, 1979). Both researchers generated extensive work on the influence of Hollywood to fashion products during the 1930s.
[41] Ely, 29.
[42] Irene Sharaff, "Stage Clothes Design," in Work Opportunities in American Fashion Design: Proceedings of the Conference Held in New York City, April 23 and 42, 1941, (Carbondale, I.L.: S.I.N.U., 1941), 39-41.
[43] Costume Design as an Occupation, 26.

creators. Freelancing offered a foothold for those wishing to break into the business. Early career literature mentioned it as one way manufacturers procured designs. By 1936, however, freelancing opportunities were not recommended as an entry into design as a profession. One designer described why:

> No beginner should free-lance. It provides no experience and no training. Better any job inside the organization at any pay or none, so long as it affords an opportunity to gain an insight into the practical side of the work. Once seen, style ideas are so easily stolen that few free-lance designers are ever paid for all the creations they show to manufacturers.[44]

The author of Costume Design as an Occupation also included pattern designing, stage costuming and teaching as possible career areas for the designer, but described each of these professional areas as offering very few entry level opportunities and, limited compared to the opportunities available in wholesale manufacturing.

The work description in the 1930s career literature demonstrated a clear trend through the decade toward promoting design for mass production as the growing career area for young designers. While young hopefuls were being warned off of starting careers in retail design work or theater costume work, the opportunity in wholesale design were reported as plentiful and growing. It is interesting that in 1935, Oglesby described wholesale design as a career where the designer only had creative affairs to address, leaving all the business matters to the owners and principals of the manufacturing concern. However, several who were publicized in the career literature as examples of career success in the area of design, did, in fact, own their own wholesale businesses, for example Nettie Rosenstein, Hattie Carnegie (who also owned a retail business), Pauline Fields and Helen Cookman. Opportunity existed for designers to work under these named individuals, as the rigors of business would require

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[44] Costume Design as an Occupation, 14.

assistance in product development. This was implied through constant urging by the various authors for aspiring designers to gain experience in any number of apprenticeships, assistant or other entry-level jobs in the industry. But this posed an irony. Career literature echoed the disgust that designers had for the lack of recognition they received, given that the manufacturer's success was largely due to the designer's own creative contributions. However, the very owner/designers who were vying for recognition in the press, from the industry, and through career literature, were not paying due appreciation to their own designers and craftspeople who were contributing to their own success. Fame, recognition and wealth as a fashion designer were clearly connected to ownership.

Career literature decidedly promoted careers in the New York area. Discussion of work opportunities in design outside New York was virtually non-existent. While Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Kansas City, San Francisco and Los Angeles were mentioned as centers for apparel development, no information on career opportunities or advancement in design was provided for these cities. California was the exception, but discussion was primarily limited to the Hollywood designers. Warburton and Maxwell remarked briefly on the sportswear industry in Los Angeles. They wrote:

> ...there is another group of designers in California who make clothes, not for the movies, but for the retail market all over the country. The better class wholesale market used to exist almost exclusively in New York, but this California group, with its center in Los Angeles, is becoming increasingly important, especially for sports clothes."[45]

Increasingly important as California creators may have been, no career literature generated during the 1930s focused on opportunities in this market nor were California designers included in any lists of noted or influential American talent. This bias may have

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[45] Warburton and Maxwell, 26.

been due in part to the geography of the publishing industry. The fashion press main offices were largely located in New York. Publishing houses were also located in New York. While ready-to-wear manufacturing was becoming a wide spread business, the communication arm was centrally located in Manhattan.

Education, Training, Qualifications and Demand

Fashion design was definitely not an entry level job, but was very much an executive level career. As the decade progressed, career literature emphasized more and more the designer's role as a profit center for the business. Fashion designers were often entrepreneurs and individuals willing to take both creative and business risks. Even those designers employed by manufacturers became more and more responsible for production cost of garments and were required to be savvy in terms of style, salability, materials and labor resources. But a career as a designer was held as the carrot for a growing number of hopeful young women who entered educational programs or low level jobs with the hope of working their way up. In Fashion for a Living, Warburton and Maxwell provided a "family tree of fashion" in which the complex interrelation of fashion jobs was illustrated. Heading this list, at the top of the tree schematic, was the designer with a caption reading "in her brain is born the idea."[46] So if the job of leading the creation of beautiful clothing for the women of America presented an appealing career prospect, the next question was inevitably, "how do I become a designer?" The response to this question resided somewhere in a combination of the right education, training and personal attributes.

Educational options spanned the continuum of college to vocational programs to art school to night classes. Even study-at-home guides entered the educational mix toward the

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[46] Warburton and Maxwell, 13.

end of the decade. But direction on proper educational training was inconsistent. Even though design programs had operated in America for decades, sixty-three percent of the designers surveyed in a 1920 study were reported to have been trained through their employer, versus through an educational program.[47] A 1940 publication stated that while educational requirements were constantly increasing, the minimum acceptable level of education was a high school diploma.[48] Twenty years earlier, however, in 1920, large scale wholesale design had been a profession suggested for those with a college education by Frances McGowan, who was then working as a wholesale designer.[49]

Education in design had been offered for decades, but Charles Richards explained in Art in Industry that employers did not necessarily find the prevailing educational programming relevant to the needs of industry. Apparently the industry trained its own employees out of necessity, as the programs at various educational institutions did not meet what employers felt were the specific needs of apparel design for manufacturing. M. F. Agha, Art Director for Condé Nast, added to this sentiment by describing art education in America as little more than training for "art labor."[50] According to Richards, there was a growing demand for qualified designers in wholesale manufacturing; however, the education provided by art schools involved developing ideas only on paper. Becoming a qualified designer required hands-on application to achieve adequate mastery. This included knowledge of materials, commercial or mass production methods and the interrelation of the

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[47] Richards, cited in Training for the Professions and Allied Occupations, (New York: Bureau of Vocational Information, 1924), 94.
[48] Careers in Fashion Designing, 4.
[49] McGowan 57.
[50] M.F. Agha, "Fashion Illustration," in Choosing a Life Career in the Design Arts: A Discussion of Vocational Guidance Problems, ed. The New York Regional Council, The Harmon Foundation, (New York: The National Alliance of Art and Industry, 1932), 12.

elements of aesthetics.[51] Richard's summed up the state of affairs with the following statement:

> So far, designers have been almost exclusively developed in the severe discipline of the trade. Out of many aspirants only those possessing a balance of marked practical ability, strong perseverance and artistic talent have reached success. No school provides such training in any full measure at the present time, and it would require several years to demonstrate whether a school can successfully maintain effective instruction in these lines, adequate to meet the trade needs, and whether students can be attracted to a course of this kind requiring several years of application.[52]

Schools with programs in costume design were listed in a number of career information books throughout the 1930s, with institutions generally divided between art school training and college home economics training. Art school training focused on illustration, patternmaking, and construction for a client, while college home economics training focused on clothing construction and selection for personal or family use. In either case more hands-on learning seemed to be included in the program outlines, with course titles such as pattern-making, draping and dressmaking. However, the description of the available educational training seemed disconnected from the description of the responsibilities of both the retail designer, and the wholesale designer. "But please make this very clear," stated one interviewee, "business knowledge and business shrewdness count about eight points in the great majority of cases and artistic ability about two."[53] Apparently, the need for business and management skills were critical for the designer, yet this aspect of the job was absent from almost all educational training. Career authors consistently emphasized a necessary business predisposition both in the description of designers' responsibilities and through vignettes and interviews with recognized designers. The

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[51] Richards, 24.
[52] Richards, 23.
[53] Costume Design as an Occupation, 35.

published program of ideal or typical education included construction and design courses, art and illustration courses. Careers in Fashion Designing also listed promotions and production courses, but not business courses. In fact, sociology, history and literature were considered helpful, but it was recommended that business courses be left for summer months.[54]

For those who could not afford a formal education, career literature promoted viable options. Self-study was one option. Ruth Hutton with Cooper Union authored Dress Designing for a Smart Career in 1940, providing vocational information about design along with instruction on the process of developing a garment from concept to completion. "Anyone can become a designer," she wrote, provided "...you have a natural style sense, [and] a feeling for color and texture."[55] By applying this "natural style sense" to the instructions contained in this 40 page booklet, it was implied that a young woman could step onto the path of a successful career.

Very little scholarship exists on Home Institute, Inc. and its impact on vocational education, however a list of Home Institute, Inc. titles generated during the first half of the twentieth century indicate that this publisher provided a wide range of self-study opportunities in areas of interest from women's club fundraising to tap dancing to personality development and etiquette. These books were authored by people with some professional experience in the field. Dress designing as a professional opportunity entered the Home Institute, Inc. oeuvre in 1940, most likely as a result of extensive promotion of American design during the previous decade. This book did not promise instant success, but

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[54] Fashion Design as a Career, 4.
[55] Hutton, 1.

encouraged would-be designers to pursue various entry level opportunities in order to break into professional design work.

Experience in a work room or selling in a department store was also promoted as a functional alternative for those without means for formal education, providing an insight not available in a classroom. "You can learn more about designing by spending two months in a workroom than any other way – even if you only pick up pins."[56] Moreover, while education was certainly a plus, the young person was warned by one executive:

> In practical business, the purely academic point of view is often a disadvantage. Do not tell the Seventh Avenue manufacturer that you "majored in draping." There is always the danger of being too much impressed with the importance of academic learning when related to industry. Do not bring that tendency in the shop, ever.[57]

Elsie Brown Barnes, a Department Head at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art remarked:

> I never worry about 'placing pupils.' The good ones can take care of themselves....When each class starts you can look into the faces of the pupils and almost know who is going to succeed. It is not the ones with exceptional talent, strangely enough. It's the girl who *works* [author's emphasis]. A moderate but genuine talent, industriously applied, wins out every time above the exceptional talent haphazardly applied....I've noticed, too, that boys and girls with money don't get ahead as fast as those without. They lack the need to earn, and when this urge is missing, success seems elusive.[58]

This same sentiment was repeated throughout the literature. Basically, any education was better than no education, but there was not a prescribed educational curriculum which ensured entrance to the career path of fashion design. One fashion executive decreed that the three qualities necessary for success in the fashion industry were a high school education,

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[56] Oglesby, 67-68.
[57] Max Meyer, "Designing for the Wholesale Industry," in Choosing a Life Career in the Design Arts, (New York: National Alliance of Art and Industry, 1932), 19.
[58] Oglesby, 77.

coming from an average American home, and the ability to work hard.[59] Design required an entrepreneurial spirit. Hard work, determination and a good attitude were the qualities that separated success from failure. "Just get in where the clothes are made, or sold," advised designer Nettie Rosenstein, "and do the best you know."[60]

To gain the necessary experience, the more important quality was apparently a natural talent or ability. Regardless of education or experience, an aspiring designer had to have a personal flair, "an innate sense of style," a quality that made others regard them as arbiters of style and good taste. According to some professionals, the requirements of a career in the fashion industry, and specifically design, went beyond technical training. M. F. Agha, the Art Director at Condé Nast described this quality as a "sense of elegance, which was sometimes inborn, but, oftener, developed by proper surroundings."[61] Edna Woolman Chase, Editor in Chief of Vogue during the 1930s, described the fashion business as not only one of the most lucrative, but also most difficult businesses because, in addition to the skills necessary for any type of business, a successful fashion professional needed to cultivate and possess good taste. Chase recounted a meeting with a young woman she once interviewed, and remarked on her dismay at the woman's general appearance. Otherwise experienced, well qualified and with a good personality and intelligence, the young interviewee demonstrated what Chase considered to be an unfashionable, unsophisticated level of taste in her clothing selection and personal carriage, and, as such, was not hired. [62] In a version of this same interview published years later, Chase was quoted further:

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[59] Oglesby. 64.
[60] M.D.C. Crawford, The Ways of Fashion, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1941), 260.
[61] Agha. 14.
[62] Oglesby. 83.

> One of the greatest possible assets is the ability to put yourself together well – to prove visibly what you know of fashion and good taste theoretically....When it comes to getting a job in the fashion world, one smart hat on the head is more help than knowing the history of costume by heart.[63]

While not expressly mentioned throughout the career literature during the 1930s, there was a larger issue of image, class and status that the industry had to deal with. In 1944, Business Week offered a perspective on the state of the industry as a potential employer to young people:

> The needle trades, and particularly the women's garment industry, were born in the sweat shops of New York City's lower east side, and workers of foreign extraction still predominate. Many skilled workers are getting along in years, and because the industry suffers from a lack of social and economic prestige, intelligent youngsters have been prone to forsake the family occupation.[64]

The fashion industry needed to upgrade its status in the eyes of talented, young candidates in order to attract high caliber employees. A specific level or discipline of education or training was secondary to a young candidate who presented themselves in an elegant, chic manner or who came from a higher social status. The industry was capable of providing technical training, but they could not teach poise and style. It was the candidates own personal presentation and background that expressed those important qualities to a potential employer. A background in sewing or other assembly functions was too closely identified with sweat shop labor and not in keeping with efforts to elevate the caliber of the employee and, ultimately, the image of the industry.

The industry could also not teach a candidate a strong work ethic; this came from one's upbringing. And to this end, a thread ran through the discussion of qualities such as initiative, determination and hard work as equally necessary for success in the fashion

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[63] Edna Woolman Chase, "How Fashion Became Big Business," Glamour, (1949 January), 118.
[64] "Styled in U.S.A.," Business Week, 30 September 1944, 34.

industry. Like cues leading to one's level of culture, cues such as being from a small town or middle America indicated at once that a candidate was not an immigrant and had a healthy work ethic.

The Pay, the Travel and the Perks

Whether a woman became one of the era's famous or worked without specific name recognition, fashion careers, and especially design, promised to be rewarding, exhilarating, demanding, lucrative and glamorous. Shifts in compensation trends clearly illustrated the growing importance of design skills to the ready-to-wear manufacturer. It is, however, important to make note of the income sources to be discussed. First, for any given source, there was a suggestion that the information was gathered through survey, however very little about the parameters of the various surveys was provided to readers. Questions arise such as how many people were surveyed, how many people fell into each income category described, how the surveys were administered and by whom. It is difficult to weigh the salary information provided by career literature against the census, in that the census did not separate out designers from other workers, but grouped them together as "Gainful Workers" in 1930 and "female craftsmen, foremen and kindred workers" in 1940.[65] The Census of Manufacturing separated workers into categories in terms of apprentices and regularly employed, but did not specify designers from others employed in "dressmaking," "millinery," or "tailoring." The category of "designer" in The Census of Manufacturing referred to building and architecture.[66]

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[65] "Geostat Center: Collections – Historic Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/> (Retrieved 20 January 2005).
[66] Census of Manufacturing, "Occupations – United States Summary," Volume 1910-1930, 6-16; Census of Manufacturing, "Detailed Occupation of Employed Persons, by Sex, for the United States: 1950 and 1940," Volume 1940-1950, 1-267/269.

Career literature as early as 1909 promised "big money in dressmaking [for] women who know how to profit by the labor of others, who can catch and hold trade by their original designs, and who are sincerely interested in making their wealthy customers look their best."[67] Although "big money" remained unspecified, these promised rewards were achieved by humble beginnings. Dressmakers did not begin their career as highly paid professionals, but in various assistant-level positions earning $2.00 per week. Some worked for nothing more than the experience. The next several promotions increased weekly earnings to $4.00 and then $6.00 per week as more experience was gained on various phases of garment construction. Top rewards for dressmakers who were under the employ of others during this period were reported as $12 to $14 per week for trimmers and $15 to $18 per week for fitters. The "big money" came with the next step – opening one's own shop. For women without the necessary initiative, talent for original designs, capital or contacts, the reported income was $15 per week with employment for about nine months of the year.[68] Besides financial rewards, the main benefit was first of all, opportunity for employment if one had the necessary skills. And if the woman possessed, along with the trade skills, the required business acumen, benefits included freedom.

By 1920, apprentice work in a manufacturing setting was reported in the career literature as paying $25 per week with the ability for a "young girl [to] advance rapidly if she possesses the necessary initiative."[69] Top pay for a designer was reported as $200 to $250 per week or from $10,000 to $14,000 per year. This indicates an increase of over 92 percent in eleven years from the top pay achieved by employed dressmakers in 1909. This is in keeping

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[67] Anna Steese Richardson, The Girl Who Earns Her Own Living, (New York: B.W. Dodge & Co., 1909), 62.
[68] Richardson, 63-64.
[69] McGowan, 59.

with overall wage increases. From 1900-1909, the average earnings per household was about $615 per year. From 1920-1929, average earnings per year doubled to $1,236. In addition to earnings, the perquisites were described as outstanding. To Florence McGowan, designer for Joseph A. Morris and Company in New York, the key advantage of being a designer was that "few women earning their own living can enjoy so many luxuries as do designers, or have similar opportunities for seeing the most brilliant social life in the largest cities of the world."[70] These specific luxuries included a diverse daily routine, travel abroad to Paris on a regular basis, and opportunities to go places frequented by the wealthy and privileged in order to observe their lifestyle and to make contacts. The larger businesses afforded an expense account. The primary disadvantage of this profession was working in a noisy, often dirty factory setting. And since the apparel industry functioned in large cities and centers of commerce, little opportunity existed in small towns. Pursuit of this career required moving to a large city.

Richard's 1922 study provided expanded salary information for this time period. His analysis included a nationwide survey of art industries across the United States, consisting of field study in New York and fifty-five other cities, as far west as Minneapolis and St. Louis.[71] The study broke down remuneration by type of design work. Reports showed no fixed salary scheme in custom dressmaking, but increases in salary were earned as the designer acquired more proficiency. Of those designers surveyed, novices started at $35 per week, with annual pay reaching $10,000 and in some cases as high as $20,000. Work as a wholesale designer proved to be more lucrative, with a starting salary reported to

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[70] McGowan, 59.
[71] Richards, 6-7.

be $50 per week and top salary of $25,000 per year. This study showed the starting salary for a wholesale designer was 30 percent higher than the starting salary for a dressmaker during the same era. Furthermore, wholesale design provided opportunities for additional earnings based on a percentage of sales, a benefit of volume production of a single design not possible in the custom dressmaking trade. Also, options for a share in company ownership gave incentive to talented designers. For blouse-makers, salaries ranged from $60 to $250 a week; $100 as top salary for drapers and $20 per week for beginners. Salary for designers of wholesale cloaks was reported as a range of $35 a week for beginners to at top salary of $15,000 per year. The common salary range reported for cloak and suit designers was from $3,000 to $10,000 per year.[72]

In 1935 and later reprints of Fashion Careers American Style (1936 and 1937), salaries were described as "good, and a few are fabulous. More, however, are making good pay; there are a few top ringers."[73] Clare Potter was named specifically as holding a high professional status and equally high salary: "...unlabeled, it's true, but seldom if ever unsung. With a salary accordingly."[74] The perquisites for a designer continued to be described as equally fabulous:

> Between seasons of work in the designing rooms they visit fabulous resorts, travel on fashionable boats, go where smart women wear good clothes, visit the famous dressmaking establishments of Paris and London. They take their vacations in Mexico, Guatemala or Bali...[75]

The first publication dedicated solely to the discussion of fashion design as a career was published in 1936. Previous publications consisted primarily of volumes of careers for

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[72] Richards, 6-7.
[73] Oglesby, 99.
[74] Oglesby, 101.
[75] Oglesby, 99.

women with a chapter or two dedicated to apparel trades. Fashion Careers American Style described a variety of fashion related careers, but again, one chapter focused on design as a career. Since Costume as an Occupation concentrated specifically on the profession of design, it provided a great deal of detail regarding compensation and benefits. Wholesale design had the most structured salary scale. Would-be designers were reported to start as model hands or apprentices at $15 per week, with a move up to an assistant designer, who earned $25 to $35 per week. A well-trained designer of low to moderate priced garments could expect to earn from $50 to start to $100 per week or more. Firms manufacturing at higher price points paid salaries in the $100 to $150 per week range. It was reported that male designers earned higher salaries to begin with, but that this discrimination in pay was not the case at the higher salary levels. Some women's salaries were reported in a range from $300 to $400 per week. To provide perspective, $50 per week salary, with steady employment and no lay-offs, was approximate earnings of $2,500 per year. During the 1930s, average earnings per household were reported as $1,389. So at $50 per week, a designer with some experience earned almost 80 percent above average earnings per household.[76] For salaries greater than $200 per week, partnership arrangements were often negotiated based on a percent of sales.

The more lucrative arrangements for designers were found in the medium priced and lower priced manufacturers where a higher volume of production was generated. One designer/partner reported an income of $120,000 during a peak year. This was considered exceptional – not typical earnings. However, it was reported that there were several designers

[76] "American Cultural History: 1930-1939," Kingswood College Library, <http://kclibrary.nhmcdd.edu/decade30.html> (Retrieved 19 October 2004). NOTE: Approximate yearly earnings of $2,500 were calculated by multiplying $50.00 by 50 weeks.

earning salaries at $50,000 per year. Exclusive dressmaking establishments were not in the same income range. While there was still a reported demand for exclusive clothes and plenty of work for the custom trade, a variety of overhead costs associated with operating an exclusive establishment, extensions of credit to wealthy patrons who paid slowly, and catering to the needs and wants of the well-to-do, cut into annual income considerably with reported salaries of about $10,000 per year.[77] Non-monetary benefits for wholesale designers were reported as good working conditions, high professional and social status, recognized artistic achievement, travel – domestic and abroad – and "opportunities to see many sides of life...."[78] There was also a benefit reported of flexibility for home and family. Fashion design was promoted as a profession in which a woman did not have to choose between career and marriage, but could have both. One designer contributed the following experience:

> Many designers are married and find it possible to carry on a highly successful business career and an equally successful domestic life with husband and children. Employers are not interested in the private life of a designer provided she produces results in salable models.....The really good designer can work when and how she pleases so long as she meets her business responsibility to make acceptable designs, to have them ready when wanted and to keep her firm abreast or ahead of competitors....I've had months of leave, to have my baby and for family illnesses, and had my job held open until I came back. Any designer worth her salt will meet with every consideration from her employer. She lays the golden eggs. So the better designer you are, the better married life you can have, and the more leeway is allowed for contingencies of your home responsibilities.[79]

In 1940 an identical salary and benefit structure was defined in Careers in Fashion Designing. Entry level salaries reported remained about the same through 1940. It was the top salaries, perquisites and other benefits that were promoted by the author as areas of new

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[77] Costume Design as an Occupation, 25.
[78] Costume Design as an Occupation, 36-37.
[79] Costume Design as an Occupation, 37.

growth and expansion for this career area. Beginners started as model/sample hands or apprentices at $15 per week and moved up to assistant designers at a range from $25 to $50 week. Designers made $50 to $100 per week with reported pay at $100 to $150 per week in larger cities. Some salaries were reported as high as $300 to $400 per week. Good working conditions and steady employment compared to other positions in areas of garment development. "...Although employees may be laid off at different periods of the year, designers are retained the year round."[80] For top designers, travel, both domestic and abroad to Paris, other European cities and fashionable summer and winter resorts, was reported as an important function of the work. And the same policy toward family and marriage was articulated about the career of fashion design in 1940 in Careers in Fashion Designing.[81]

From the 1920s through the 1930s a designer's job included a significant and increasing amount of creative research through travel and participation in upscale social events. Even as designers were reported to be growing less and less dependent on Paris for style direction, travel to resorts and events frequented by the wealthy and influential were considered an integral part of the job and designers were provided expense accounts by many employers to accommodate this type of research.

While design positions were held by both men and women, the literature published in the mid and late 1930s promoted friendliness toward women in design and no discrimination toward women with families. In the wake of relentless unemployment caused by nationwide economic depression, married women suffered persistent discrimination in a broad scope of occupations. Women were routinely released from government, teaching, railroad and

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[80] Careers in Fashion Designing, 10.

[81] It is important to note that, with the exception of Charles Richards analysis provided in Art in Industry, authors provided little information regarding how salary information was accumulated. Little data or documentation was provided on how salary surveys were conducted, how many or who was polled.

various other jobs if their spouse was employed.[82] And there were also reports of abortions on a "massive scale" by women whose jobs would not be held during pregnancy or by women who would be placed out of work due to pregnancy and subsequently could not afford to support a child.[83] Family friendliness and flexibility was apparently a very important issue for young women planning their personal and professional futures during this particular era.

The overall trends depicted in this salary information provided insight. Basically, entry level pay was in line with the reported average income for 1910-1919, 1920-1929, and 1930-1939, while advanced salaries far exceeded average income figures.[84] For designers depicted in the 1930s, travel and entertaining seemed prevalent and there was also a trend indicated that as the decade progressed, perquisites other than travel were common for upper level designers, such as commissions or shares in the company profits, and job security. Gender issues associated with working women, such as concerns related to children and family were discussed in a positive manner, assuring women that femininity was not lost by working in this industry.

Career Fiction

Non-fiction career literature during this era provided descriptions of the lives of various designers. These accounts included education, a brief time line of professional positions and achievements, and descriptions of hobbies, illuminating the most positive aspects of the designer's lives, avoiding anything related to failure or struggle. For example, designer/owners were often described as leaving employment to launch their own company,

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[82] Kessler-Harrison, 257

[83] Leslie Reagan, "Reproductive Practices and Politics," in Major Problems in American History, ed. Colin Gordon, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 287.

[84] See Appendix I for a chart outlining salary and benefit breakdowns reported in the career literature.

but the non-fiction career literature did not explain how the designer located and negotiated space and wares, procured financial backing, hired and fired staff, or cultivated financiers to carry the business through lean times. Even though these issues were brought up in the general discussion of fashion careers, that part of the story, the less glamorous side, was glossed over or left out entirely in the interviews and vignettes of the individual designer's lives.

The *career fiction* or *career romance* genre, which emerged during the 1930s, depicted the lives of women in various occupations, telling stories of career-type work. Written specifically for a young female audience, readers explored career options through the experiences of the characters in the story, illustrating how a young woman navigated her way through job, social and sometimes domestic demands, offering strategies for negotiating necessary balance. Dodd, Mead and Company – one publisher of such fiction – published novels authored by professionals who held the real-life jobs being performed by their fictional counterparts. These stories provided information about education and training, potential salary and descriptions of the work and daily routine.

The specific goal of Dodd, Mead and Company was not put forth directly, but information was available to those interested in learning more. In the introductory leafs of a Dodd, Mead and Company career book, readers were invited to write for a pamphlet containing details about how books were chosen for the series. "Every Dodd, Mead book must pass a severe four point test before it can even be considered for publication. If you would like to know more about Dodd, Mead Career Books, their authors, their aims and their

accomplishments, ask for a free booklet."[85] Given that Dodd, Mead and Company utilized working professionals as authors, and that they provided a mission statement and detailed information to readers may indicate the publisher's dedication to accuracy and detail regarding the depiction of the career.

Falling into the category of "light fiction," these stories entertained while informing readers and ultimately provided a happy ending for the reader and the heroine, with all issues and challenges neatly resolved by the last page of the book. Even though romance and sometimes marriage were included in the plots, these entanglements and obligations did not deter the heroine from her intended career goals. In fact, some stories showed how a young career seeker could manage romance and marriage and still maintain a viable, successful working life.[86] Also, as "light fiction," very little scholarship has examined the history or impact of the career book or career romance genre. However, it appealed to the same audience as girls' series fiction, a popular format throughout the twentieth century.[87] Aspects of the series fiction genre dovetailed with career fiction. Career fiction, entering the marketplace at a much later date than series fiction, was most likely an offshoot of the popular series format for adolescent girls and young women.[88]

A lucrative market was recognized for fiction written for a young, adolescent reader as early as 1868, when Little Women (and subsequent stories about the March sisters) written

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[85] Gallagher, *facing leaf inside front cover.*

[86] "Women in American History," Britannica Online, 1999, <http://search.eb.com/women/articles/Baldwin_Faith.html> (Retrieved 20 July 2004); Kathleen Reuter Chamberlain, "Every Girl's Ambition: Careers in Girls' Series Fiction, 1940-1970," The Roundup, December 1999, 106-111.

[87] Sherrie A. Inness, Nancy Drew and Company: Culture Gender and Girls' Series, (Bowling Green, O.H.: Bowling Green State University, 1997). Inness examined a host of girls' series fiction from throughout the twentieth century.

[88] Career fiction emerged around the mid-1930s in a small way, becoming more and more popular throughout the 1940s through the 1970s. Similar to series fiction, career fiction publishers produced numerous books, each one with different characters and different occupations depicted. Series books offered readers numerous stories about one central character, in each book experiencing a new adventure.

by Louisa May Alcott, was published.[89] Series fiction during this time period, written for both boys and girls, became increasingly popular during the years to follow. The golden age of series fiction has been determined as 1900 to 1930. Reading was key entertainment for young people during this time – a time period without television and only limited access to motion picture entertainment.[90]

Girls in the Depression-era welcomed Nancy Drew, a series which became tremendously popular with young readers. They admired Nancy's leadership, strength and achievement, qualities at that time typically reserved for boys in fiction. "Though she courts adventure and faces threats, she never has to contend with the humiliations, self-doubt, and uncertainties common to her age."[91] The Nancy Drew series was launched in 1930 and was a much emulated property. "It was a project that lit a beacon in the publishing world."[92] Similar to the themes in the popular Nancy Drew series, career fiction heroines entertained young, adolescent readers with the same themes of leadership, strength and achievement. Nancy Drew was copied with all-but-identical girl sleuth series, like the Dana girls.

Other series featured young women in other types of adventures, for example Cherry Ames.[93] The Cherry Ames series conveyed information to adolescents about nursing as a career. The series ran from 1943 through the 1960s and highlighted Nurse Cherry Ames in various jobs, beginning with war nurse during World War II. The series continued to depict Nurse Ames in civilian nursing posts in later years. Cherry Ames was unique in that it was

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[89] Inness, 4.
[90] Inness, 5.
[91] Anne Scott MacLeod, American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, (Athens, G.A.: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), 41.
[92] MacLeod, 30.
[93] The Dana girl's series was written by the same author as the Nancy Drew series, Carolyn Keene (Harriett S. Adams) and ran from 1934 to 1968. Cherry Ames series ran from 1943 to the late 1960s and featured the career of a war nurse. It was written by Helen Wells and Julie Tatham and was published by Grosset and Dunlap.

both a series and a career portrayal. Career books generally consisted of one to three volumes about a given character and their career, focusing more on a variety of women working in diverse career areas. Published during World War II, and several years after, Cherry Ames books have been identified as one of several popular culture mechanisms "to convince more women to join the nurses who were contributing to the War Effort."[94] Inness went on to make an interesting observation about women and careers:

> Through a variety of means, including posters, films, and girls' series books, the nurse's career was made to look glamorous and alluring. At the same time this campaign resulted in attracting new recruits to nursing, it also operated to assure the audience that wartime nurses were in no way losing their femininity.[95]

The Cherry Ames series was a viable promotional tool as well as entertainment to an audience of adolescent girls, who were exploring their various opportunities as they approached high school, college, wage-earning and adulthood. Sally Perry examined the Cherry Ames series in conjunction with other popular culture media about nurses generated during the same time period; for example posters, pamphlets and feature motion pictures. In addition to a popular culture survey, Perry interviewed women who worked as nurses during the war. She found that negative aspects of war, like wounds, death, combat or general drudgery, were downplayed. "As with most popular culture of the time for adolescents, the series softened some of the hard aspects of reality."[96] Aspects such as pay, educational requirements and war training, however, were reported as very accurately portrayed.

Scholarship which examined fictional portrayals of working, or wage-earning women, in the early twentieth century and Depression era focused primarily on negative

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[94] Inness, 8.
[95] Inness, 8.
[96] Sally E. Perry, "You Are Needed, Desperately Needed! Cherry Ames in World War II," in Nancy Drew and Company, ed. Sherrie Inness (Bowling Green, O.H.: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 135.

images of women in the workplace. Laura Hapke, author of Daughters of the Great Depression, described the era's fiction as "a gallery of homeloving [*sic*] or workplace earth mothers; their monstrous, promiscuous, or love-obsessed antitheses; picket-line adjuncts, even saints, but never agents; and too-manly New Women." She also noted that "for many of the predominantly masculine producers of fiction in the 1930s...women were intruders in the workplace."[97]

Written for an adolescent and young adult audience, career fiction provided young female readers situations to explore adult experiences of work and romance in a safe, positive, and age-appropriate manner, entirely incongruent with the negative positions of the more mainstream adult fiction of the same era described in the quotation above. It is interesting to point out, as Hapke noted, while mainstream fiction was dominated by male writers, series fiction, and career books were authored mostly by women. Among the lists of careers depicted, many included traditional female jobs such as teaching and nursing. But others ventured into more non-traditional careers for women at the time such as architect, doctor and journalist. There was a trend toward greater numbers of women attending college in the 1920s. With this, the career horizon in general expanded for women considerably and this was reflected in the emergence of this new sub-genre of adolescent fiction.

During the depression era, three career novels were published directly related to the fashion industry. Two of these depicted fashion design as a career: Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer (1940) by Louise Barnes Gallagher; and Twenty Four Hours a Day (1936) by Faith Baldwin. The third volume was Polly Tucker, Merchant (1937)

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[97] Laura Hapke, Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work and Fiction in the American 1930s, (Athens, G.A.: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 221.

by Sara Pennoyer. Polly Tucker, Merchant and Frills and Thrills were published by Dodd, Mead and Company. Sara Pennoyer worked as an advertising manager and then as a promotions director for Bonwit Teller. Pennoyer's story focused on the retail merchandising business.[98] Louise Barnes Gallagher became a noted designer during the 1930s and wrote a series of books about her fashion designer heroine, Mary Bray, extending into the 1950s.[99] Twenty Four Hours a Day was published in 1936, with three reprints in 1937, 1946 and 1976 by various publishers. Unlike Pennoyer and Gallagher, Baldwin was a professional writer. Her career spanned 56 years, in which she published over 85 books. Common to Baldwin's work were themes of women who worked outside their homes and functioned amid wealth and high society while doing so. She was reported to be an extremely popular writer during her career. In 1936 alone she published eight works and saw four produced into feature films.[100]

"Twenty Four Hours a Day"

Concentrating on two years in the life of young designer, Christine Carstairs, this story took the young reader through a glamorous career adventure in fashion design. Based on mention of the National Recovery Administration and several descriptions of economic conditions surrounding retail business, the years were most likely 1933 through 1935. Woven into the plot were issues of work ethic, family versus career responsibilities,

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[98] Warburton and Maxwell, 4; Sara Pennoyer, Polly Tucker, Merchant, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1937, 1939 & 1941). Because this novel does not portray a fashion designer, it does not fall within the research parameter and was not reviewed. As a point of interest, however, Sara Pennoyer authored another fashion career book for Dodd, Mead & Co. published in 1961 titled Maggie in Fashion: Advertising, Display and Promotion.

[99] Louise Barnes Gallagher, Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer, (New York: Dodd Mead, 1940); Mary Bray, Fashion Designer, (New York: Dodd Mead, 1945); with Wyndham Lee, Buttons and Beaux, (New York: Dodd Mead, 1953).

[100] "Women in American History," Britannica Online, 1999, <http://search.eb.com/women/articles/Baldwin_Faith.html> (20 July 2004).

entrepreneurship, design piracy, the impact of the depression upon domestic clothing demand, dealing with professional jealousy, proper business conduct and personal etiquette, lessons on what constituted good taste, and class issues between customers and employees. The story provided a platform on which the heroine demonstrated positive examples of how to deal with these social and workplace challenges in an exemplary manner, striving to exercise sound judgment, honesty and loyalty.

As the story opened, Christine was a young assistant, approximately 25 or 26 years of age, working for a leading retail designer named Hilda Staneway. By necessity, Christine's job demanded her to be a social creature, always on the look out. She explained:

> "We're compelled to lunch," she said gaily, "and at what are known as the right places. To see and be seen. It's all part of the game."...She was seen in the best places and by the best people....Staneway's assistants always were. It was a condition of employment.[101]

Christine's original career plans included studying art in Paris. However, her family's wealth was lost in the stock market crash and the stress caused her father's death. Hopes of achieving fame as a fine portrait artist ended. She was faced with two options – to either marry well to the son of a long-time family friend or get a job. Opting for independence and self-sufficiency to support her surviving mother and sister, Christine attended Cooper Union in New York and earned an internship in Paris, working in a cutting room. At the age of 26, she was receiving accolades inside the industry for launching a moderately priced ready-made line for the prestigious Staneway's custom label to be marketed through an equally prestigious retail shop, Clarkson's. This was considered extremely innovative since

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[101] Faith Baldwin, Twenty Four Hours A Day, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., 1936, 1937), 14.

Clarkson's was not at all connected with moderately priced goods. Christine explained the strategy:

> "With a line especially designed and bearing the Staneway's name the curse of the inexpensive label would be taken away. It's a line for youth, of course...after all, debutantes nowadays haven't the money to spend which they once had."[102]

As a valued assistant, she was put in charge of this project with Staneways, even though full design credit was given to her employer. She hoped someday for her own shop and her own label. Just as she was offered an opportunity by friend and financier, Duke Yorke, to back her in her own business, she was approached by Clarkson's owner, Larry Clarkson, to come to work for him as the head designer of a new American design custom department. The two business deals were clearly defined. Duke Yorke offered the following opportunity to Christine:

> "You told me what you wanted the night ... we met. A place of your own, a chance to make good. Very well, it's yours for the asking. I'll set you up in your own shop. Carstairs Inc. We'll find the best location for you, we'll turn it over to the decorators – under your guidance. You'll hire the best people in New York, you can go to Paris and find some miraculous female to make your hats....We'll put on shows that knocks Staneway's eye out, and I'll see to it in the background you have the best publicity man money can buy. There'll be ample advertising appropriation.... (Author's ellipses) I'll launch you, I'll make good on any deficit you may encounter for, say, three years. When you begin to show a profit you can cut me in, as a silent partner. Or, you can repay me over a term of years."[103]

The business description was consistent with the non-fiction career literature: a top location, exclusively decorated, with adequate capital to fund necessary start-up and operational costs until profitability was achieved. Christine was also offered a position with the established Clarkson's retail shop. Owner Larry Clarkson laid out his offer to Christine:

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[102] Baldwin, 8.
[103] Baldwin, 29.

> "Clarkson's has always stood for exclusive design and quality in the ready-to-wear field. [My father] realizes that our competitors have established custom departments and I have convinced him that the American designer has long since come into her own...Would you consider such a position, Miss Carstairs?....your work here would be your own, Miss Carstairs. You would receive full credit. And you'd have a big organization back of you. I am in the position to offer you eight thousand a year, and commission on any sales you make personally."[104]

This business configuration seemed less in keeping with prevailing business structures described in the non-fiction career literature. Actually, the trend was moving away from custom clothing and into ready-to-wear.

However, Christine accepted the position with Clarkson's. She was part of a team of designers but because of her talent and experience she was appointed the unofficial head of the department. The development of this new department provided the reader a glimpse into the inner workings of a design studio. Of the four custom designers, three were women, and one man designed tailored goods. Each hired his or her own team of fitters and seamstresses. The author described Christine's work process:

> Christine had a...workroom of her own, with good light, in which at a long table she made her sketches and worked with remnants of material on a miniature figure, draping, cutting, pinning.[105]

And the author also illustrated examples of how Christine was inspired and how those elements of inspiration were translated into workable garment products:

> An amazing Chinese robe, heavenly blue, with strange symbols, marvelously embroidered and with jade buttons....It was from this robe...its richness, its incredible workmanship, that Christine derived the idea of the Chinese influence in the autumn line she designed....The lines, the severity, the beauty, appealed to her enormously and she yearned, as soon as she set eyes on it, to translate those lines into modern apparel for the modern American woman.[106]

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[104] Baldwin, 36.
[105] Baldwin, 41.
[106] Baldwin, 83.

Throughout the organization of the new department, Christine worked very closely with Larry Clarkson. Very early in the story they fell in love and were married, establishing residence in the penthouse on the top floor of Clarkson's store building. The remainder of the story focused on Christine's struggle to balance marriage and work – all in the same building. And being a part of a larger retail organization added complexities to the story beyond the workings of the designer. The reader observed Christine navigate her way through the politics of dealing with a whole host of ambitious, ruthless, professional women each determined to protect her own turf and widen her scope within the company structure.

Rita Allen started working for Clarkson's at the age of seventeen. By her mid-thirties she had achieved a high level position, the trust of the owners, and was noted by Christine as "the power behind the throne."[107] Because of Rita's personal romantic feelings for Larry Clarkson, she had hopes of somehow being noticed by him as more than a valued member of the senior staff. So Christine had a ready-made enemy when her own relationship with Larry developed into dating and marriage. Under the guise of friendship and camaraderie, as a Clarkson key staff member, Rita managed to get into Christine's confidence in several instances then cunningly used the information to sabotage her. And when it was announced that Christine would return to her position as head designer in the custom department after her honeymoon, Rita was publicly supportive but did intimate to a few carefully selected people in Christine's department that with so many people out of work that to some her continued employment might appear inappropriate.[108] Rita also planted spies, employees in

[107] Baldwin, 60.
[108] Baldwin, 77.

her favor, in key positions throughout the company who fed her information about Larry and Christine, and used her position in the company to reward her conspirators.

Sara Thorpe, a young and ambitious writer, ran the new advertising department at Clarkson's. Sara had social and professional ambitions and felt that Larry's wealth and position could help her attain them. She was actually in love with Duke Yorke and jealous of his friendship and admiration for Christine. For this reason Sara felt no remorse as she attempted to push Christine aside and pursue Larry to her own end. This antagonistic personal relationship between designer and advertising manager culminated in a power struggle over promotional support for Christine's department. Christine felt slighted in her share of exposure and the discussion provided an insightful explanation to the reader about the plight of the designer and the practice of pirating or copying:

> [Sara] said, in effect, that the very nature of Miss Carstairs' department tied her hands. Miss Carstairs and her coworkers were not represented in the outside fashion shows which Sara's department, in co-operation with Rita, [was] planning to put over during the season. They couldn't be, any more than they could have their models displayed in the windows, for fear of copyists. The most that the advertising end could do was to run an occasional fashion note, almost a society item, which would feature the fact that the Clarkson custom-made frocks were seen in the best places on the best-dressed women in town....No sketches of the custom-made clothes could be made available to the public through the medium of advertising. Sara couldn't do more than oversee the occasional copy which went out about the department, copy which was in the nature of the announcement.[109]

It was presented to the reader that possibly fear of products being copied by other manufactures explained the limited amount of exposure designers or their designs received during this era, especially designers in the employ of others. Readers were presented with the idea, through the story, that American designs and designers were inspired and intriguing, but received limited visual promotion for fear of being copied. Actually, several American

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[109] Baldwin, 230.

designers ran advertisements in the pages of Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. A few designers included images of clothing while others, such as Elizabeth Hawes, used a graphic logo. There was, however, a tendency for those who included images of specific clothing to shield details of the design either through the pose of the model, or lighting, giving the reader a taste of the silhouette and design direction, but not entirely divulging specific construction or fabrication details.

Readers were also exposed to lessons in business etiquette and good taste, as demonstrated by the heroine. They received such tips, through Christine's good example, as not to talk loudly in crowds, and that two lumps of sugar was "bourgeois."[110] There were also tips woven into the story on when to acknowledge a meeting with a written note and when a phone call was most appropriate.[111] Christine scorned women who indulged in cocktails during the work day.[112] There was even a tip provided on proper protocol when discussing members of one's staff with other executives.[113] Much like the Cherry Ames character, femininity in one's actions was stressed. Even in a business setting, one was to behave like a lady and business did not need to take away from a woman's femininity.

Interestingly, descriptions of clothing or tips on what to wear was not emphasized. In fact, this story served almost as a primer for young women on office politics, business ethics and professional conduct in an executive role. Christine's behavior served as an example to women on how to evaluate a situation and make an appropriate decision. The fact that she was a fashion designer reinforced the position that design was an executive, leadership role

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[110] Baldwin, 6, 113.
[111] Baldwin, 40.
[112] Baldwin, 46.
[113] Baldwin, 62.

in an organization with far more responsibility attached to it than creative design and product development.

Christine overcame troubles with her adversaries, primarily by exhibiting exceptional strength of character. Wrongdoing was revealed and, instead of staying employed at the store, Christine left Clarkson's as a designer. She opened her own retail shop with the backing of Duke Yorke.

While this fictional career novel in many ways complimented the information in the non-fiction career literature, the opening of a retail shop was incongruent. Wholesale design was promoted as the growth area during this era and retail design shops were reported to be in decline; diminishing in profitability and work opportunity. However divergent these elements were, a custom retail setting was more in keeping with a story about glamour, wealth and privilege. Ready-to-wear clothed the masses and custom apparel was for the elite few.

In addition to the business aspects of Christine's life, her personal life reflected a very posh, upscale standard of living. Her home was taken care of by a paid staff. She and her husband Larry spent weekends away with friends in fashionable retreats. And with the exception of titled Europeans who shopped at Clarkson's, there was no presence of any ethnicity and no presence of *nouveau riche*. Even the names of all the characters signified white, upper-class Americans.

"Frills and Thrills. The Career of a Young Fashion Designer"

This story takes the reader through three and a half years of Mary Bray's experiences in the wholesale apparel industry on Seventh Avenue, showing each step toward her ultimate career as a wholesale fashion designer. The reader first met the heroine, Mary Bray, in the

spring of 1936 at the age of about 18 or 19. She attended an exclusive girl's school and inspired much admiration among her fellow classmates with her stylish, well-made wardrobe which she designed and made herself. But this was only a hobby. She commented to a friend that she would never be a professional dressmaker because the pay was too low and the work was too hard.[114] She had dreams of studying art and becoming a sculptress. Up to this point in her life she only made clothing for herself and, as young child, for her dolls. But coming to the aid of a school friend, whose family had met with financial disaster due to the depression, with a specially designed new dress, hairstyle and accessories marked the very beginning of Mary Bray's career as a designer.

Later that same spring, Mary Bray and her family met with their own disaster. Her father's sudden death required her to leave school and go to work to help support herself and her mother. They sold their home in the prestigious Gramercy Park neighborhood in New York and moved to a more modest neighborhood, housing mostly students. Because of her love of clothes, Mary Bray immediately narrowed her job search to the clothing business. During a previous summer vacation, she ran errands for Jacques, her mother's custom dressmaker and family friend. Like so many other custom dressmakers, Jacques had recently closed his business as growing numbers of his established clientele lost their fortunes to the failing economy. Returning to work there was not an option. After studying the employment ads, Mary Bray decided the Seventh Avenue wholesale district had many opportunities and seemed like the next logical place to launch a job search. Two opportunities seemed most viable: model or seamstress. While she had far more experience in sewing, modeling offered the higher starting salary, $25 per week.

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[114] Gallagher, 26.

Mary Bray worked the showroom modeling circuit for six months, spending no more than a week at any one establishment. Repeatedly her employment was terminated due to her poor modeling/sales skills. But a few times she quit due to poor working conditions. This six month jaunt through Seventh Avenue provided the reader with a glimpse of the range of quality, decorum and professionalism among the wholesale firms. Often Mary Bray left work completely spent from the day's hectic pace. Several times she fended off unwanted advances from buyers and salesmen. Once she quit after a day because the clothes were just too poorly designed and constructed, that she was embarrassed to show them. But all of this experience helped her to eventually earn top model's salary of $35 per week with the firm of Waldo & Stroheim, and achieve industry respect as one of the best showroom models in New York.

Over the next two years, Mary Bray proved herself to be a hard worker, and her curiosity about all the workings of the firm won her favor with the owners. Her style, well-bred manner and distinctive personal wardrobe intrigued them, and she was eventually encouraged to consider joining their design staff. With the mentorship of the firm's head designer and through employer-paid night school courses in sketching and color at The Malvern School, Mary Bray was promoted. In one season she established herself as a fresh talent and was awarded a trip to Paris in the summer of 1939 to view the collections.

Due to Hitler's movements through Europe, however, most American buyers, manufacturers and tourists evacuated. But Mary Bray stayed for four months, navigating her way through the Paris showrooms with the help of friends and acquaintances. Upon her return home in November of 1939, Mary Bray was one of the few Americans able to provide any word on Paris trends and she became a highly sought-after resource by buyers and the

press. Propelled into the lime-light, Mary Bray received a lucrative offer to join the design staff of another large, prestigious manufacturer. The owners offered her creative freedom, recognition, and a salary of $4,000 which more than doubled her earnings of $1,820 per year.

The dialogue and prose of this story was stilted and the story line continually delved into the minutia of pinning, cutting and sewing. But the purpose of this genre was not to produce fine literature. It was, instead, to entertain and provide young readers with some idea about the skills and responsibilities of the career area. Gallagher's eye for detail as a designer and her specific industry experience were presented through accounts of choosing, fitting and cutting a purchased pattern, hemming a dress, or running a fitting session with a live fitting model. She also provided specific information about the inner workings of a manufacturing firm and how a designer functioned in the process. The author also discussed, through the characters' dialogue, the various ways designers worked, learned their trade and communicated their ideas. Head designer Miss O'Brien, explained to Mary Bray:

> "Although I can't draw a line, those of us who start with the fabrics first, and know the feel of them, who begin with the draping of the cloth and gradually work out our ideas until we have a finished model, know our profession thoroughly. Few seamstresses ever become designers now. Their places have been taken by the girls who come in with talent as sketchers, having learned the fundamentals of proportion and design in their art courses....These younger designers begin with the idea first, putting it on paper. Then they perfect the sketches, until the paper design looks right. After that, it is worked out and adapted to the cloth, with the real designing touches added afterward. Good design can result either way. Some use both."[115]

The author attempted to construct the whole story – not merely the periods of success, but also the hardships, disappointments and failures. Mary Bray entered the workforce only weeks after her father's death with only a high school education. Trying to make as much money as possible, she became a model – a career she was ill-prepared and ill-suited for and,

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[115] Gallagher, 148.

as a result, suffered weekly rejection for months until she learned the job well enough to stay employed. Once promoted to the design staff, Mary Bray battled fatigue, sleeplessness and feelings of insecurity. Inspiration eluded her and, only having designed for herself, she was not skilled in blending creativity with necessary cost effectiveness for mass production. As an American traveling in Europe during 1939, her safety was in jeopardy and, upon returning home, was greeted with jealousy and animosity by her older, more experienced co-workers, as she possessed information which put her alone in the spotlight. She generated more animosity from her co-workers by insisting that technical aspects of pattern development be shifted to manufacturing and that she have two assistants to run up her samples, freeing her time for the more creative and managerial functions of her job. Like her Twenty Four Hours a Day counterpart, Christine Carstairs, Mary Bray was also faced with the decision of marrying well to support herself and her mother, or seeking employment. And, like Christine, Mary Bray opted to be more self-reliant and found a job rather than marry a man she did not love. At the end of the story, when she falls in love and receives another marriage proposal, 22-year-old Mary Bray discussed her feelings with a friend, realizing how important work and contribution was for her in ways other than just wage-earning:

> "I'd feel duty bound to fulfill my contract with the Sinnotts anyway, even if marriage had to wait for six months or a year. After all...I'm only twenty-two, and seething with ambition. If you were I, wouldn't you think a job like this deserved the best you could give it – not matter what happened next?"
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> "Definitely, emphatically – yes....You would be a frustrated, unhappy person if you were not permitted to tackle this job and make good on it."[116]

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[116] Gallagher, 276.

Whereas ethnicity was not present in Twenty Four Hours a Day, Frills and Thrills described a more diverse setting, with characters names ranging from Mary Bray's own Anglo-Saxon surname, to Irish, German and Jewish surnames.

Themes throughout Frills and Thrills were consistent with the non-fiction career literature. Coming from a good, wholesome upbringing with a demonstrated sense of style was primary. Also important was a determined focus, a strong work ethic and the need to earn a living. Education was clearly secondary to practical experience. Mary Bray entered the industry with a high school education, but had a natural talent that she exhibited in her ability to design and wear her own wardrobe, and, later, in her suggestions to improve the wear-ability or appeal of garments.[117] And this story line supported the claim that a position in design was not an entry level job, but was attained by working up through the ranks of the industry. Salary and perquisites of designers were also compatible with those reported in the non-fiction career literature. As a staff designer Mary Bray worked for about $35-40 per week, with her next move earning a salary of $4,000 per year. The company owner, Mr. Stroheim, advised her, "...you'd better think about this designing business....Remember this. Fashion designing is tremendously important. Women like Miss O'Brien make big salaries, with bonuses added when their dresses sell especially well."[118] And the big salaries were described later to Mary Bray:

> "If you don't earn $10,000 a year, plus some fat bonuses, I'm going to disown you as not worth your salt. That, you understand, takes time – and experience. And you don't receive that until you can work entirely on your own"[119]

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[117] Gallagher, 142.
[118] Gallagher, 142.
[119] Gallagher, 153.

Top salaries described in Frills and Thrills were consistent with the upper level compensations described in the non-fiction career literature. Designers could earn a salary and bonus based on talent and performance.

These career fiction selections presented a glimpse of the world of the fashion designer in the 1930s. As fiction, the primary purpose was to entertain and, in doing so, might contain an intertwining of fact and folly. However, aside from creative license on each author's part to present an entertaining story, events and depictions did complement information put forth in the non-fiction career selections. For example, both designers – Christine and Mary Bray – were extremely hard workers with an exhaustive work ethic. Each needed to work to support herself as well as other family members. Christine and Mary Bray grew up in surroundings of some privilege and society and needed to find work due to the death of their fathers. This plot element resembled a popular late nineteenth-century literary device which used the theme of hardship at a young age without one or both parents to provide the young hero or heroine a tragic struggle, ultimately delivering them to a "better life with money, protection and education."[120] With this, the character, usually a young adult, or even a child, developed a strong inner character and sense of gentility from loving parents before losing one or both of them to unexpected disaster. The young hero or heroine was "always distinguished from their non-rising street fellows by unusual decency and manners."[121] Through losing their fathers, the primary source of income in each of their families, the lives Christine and Mary Bray knew and were planning for, ended. These young

[120] MacLeod, 161.
[121] MacLeod, 160-161.

women faced and overcame extraordinary, unforeseen challenges, each stronger, more independent and in a better professional position for their struggle.

Fashion design was depicted as real work and not merely as "window dressing" for society women. There was no 'dabbling' in this profession if one were to succeed. It required dedication, hard work and talent. Not so coincidentally, both heroines originally wanted to pursue the fine arts – Christine as a portrait painter and Mary Bray as a sculptor. Those hopes were ended when financial downturn meant that they could not pursue the appropriate training. Ironically, being a fine artist required more formal training than becoming a fashion designer. Or perhaps there was merely a more formal educational structure in place for the fine artist. Several designers profiled in the career literature entered design through a love and talent for drawing. For example, Muriel King was a watercolorist.

Both non-fiction and fiction career literature presented a constructed reality of the world and work of the fashion designer. This was most unanimously depicted as a career path to be pursued by women. Non-fiction literature incorporated the voices of numerous professionals, mostly women, providing accounts of their various careers. The need for hard work, initiative and talent was repeatedly indicated, but this was somewhat overshadowed by the emphasis of lucrative salaries and exotic travel opportunities, a lure all the more attractive in the midst of the Depression. Fictional accounts provided a bit more detail, but still softened the edges and romanticized the story with posh settings, beautiful women and handsome men, all the while leading to a happy ending.

While entry-level work was highly promoted as a necessary beginning to the career path of fashion design, the positions listed were often modeling, sketching, or other work placing one inside the design studio of a firm. Even retail work was mentioned as a

possibility. More labor related positions such as sewing or cutting, however, were not promoted. In fact, a character in Frills and Thrills, the head designer Miss O'Brien, stated that while she worked her way up to design from the ranks of seamstress work, this no longer happened. Young women now entered through sketching and other aesthetic training.[122] This aspect of training was also conveyed in non-fiction career literature, which listed workroom or retail experience, but never suggested labor or union related work, such as sewing or cutting.

The wholesale industry was promoted widely in the career literature as the area of growth for employment opportunities and as holding the most lucrative compensation. However, this portrayal was incongruent with the downward sales trends that permeated the 1930s. In 1944, Business Week described the pre-war era as "intensely competitive, and...steadily losing sales volume." And in 1939, Fortune reported a 36 percent decline in the value of women's products from 1927 to 1939 for the New York market, compared to an 18 percent decline for the U.S. Some of this deterioration, according to the report, was due to movement of the industry out of the city.[123] But there were other, more pervasive factors to be considered. Generally, the Depression limited financial resources. There was simply less money for consumers to purchase with, and less for manufacturers to send designers and buyers to Europe for inspiration or to purchase designs for reproduction.

Those American manufacturers who did purchase Paris designs for reproduction or resale in the U.S. during this era faced egregious duty. The Smoot-Hawley (Hawley-Smoot) Tariff Act of June 1930 raised U.S. tariffs to "historically high levels."[124] As a result,

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[122] Gallagher, 147-149.
[123] "America Comes to Seventh Avenue," Fortune, July 1939, 123.
[124] David M. Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 49-50.

according to a report issued by the U.S. Department of State, imports from Europe declined by nearly 71 percent from 1929 to 1932 and exports from the U. S. to Europe dropped by nearly 67 percent.[125] The U.S. industry had to depend less and less on France, which motivated the promotion of the American designer. Not only was the American designer promoted for economic reasons, but in order to encourage upscale talent to continue to feed the creative end of the industry, the image of the designer had to be elevated accordingly.

The answer to the education question was not clear cut. The successful mix of qualifications existed in the realm of a strong work ethic, natural sense of style or cultivated taste level, and keen sense of business or entrepreneurial acuity. Educational achievement appeared to be secondary if these other qualities were present, but an education, especially a college education or training in Paris, appeared to serve almost as a cue to employers that the incumbent had been exposed to some element of culture. Being well brought up inside of "society" also served as a cue.

The American dress industry was beleaguered by both image and economics. To attract a higher caliber employee, as well as gain the confidence of the consumer, positive, proactive promotion of the American dress industry was imperative.

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[125] "Smoot-Hawley Tariff," U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/id/17606.htm> (Retrieved 11 February 2005).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE AMERICAN FASHION DESIGNER IN THE MAGAZINE

Promotion of the American designer in popular periodicals during the 1930s appeared in both interviews and articles generated specifically about a designer or group of designers, and articles about industry developments which included a salute to the efforts of the designer. The tone was ultimately positive, lauding creativity and artistry in ready-to-wear equal to or surpassing French wares. One author exclaimed that while the French were great originators, their ready made product was inferior compared to that of the U.S. industry. "French ready-to-wear clothes couldn't be given away in this country."[1] Designers especially were praised for meeting the unique, specific clothing needs of the American woman, particularly excelling in ready-to-wear clothing.

Evidence indicates The Fashion Group was a key influencer in this popular press promotion. The Fashion Group was mentioned throughout several of the articles and Business Week reported on the development of this group and its many activities in 1936.[2] Historian Mary Donahue reported a key initiative of The Fashion Group was to promote American design. She stated that "Although The Fashion Group was devoted to all kinds of design, fashion design occupied a key position in its agenda....It was composed of women who set the pace and established guidelines governing women's dress and accessories."[3] Chartered in 1931, this professional group was organized by and for female executives in the fashion industries and dedicated to the promotion of American design through education and information within the workings of the fashion industry and to the public at large. As such,

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[1] Kyle Crichton, "Dress Parade," Collier's, 11 April 1936, 51.
[2] "The Fashion Business," Business Week, 29 August 1936, 30.
[3] Mary Donahue, "Design and the Industrial Arts in America, 1894-1940: An Inquiry into Fashion Design and Art and Industry," (Ph. D. diss., The City University of New York, 2001), 114.

The Fashion Group was not known by the general consumer. However, with membership from the highest echelons of fashion promotion, merchandising and design, The Fashion Group grew in scope and influence throughout the 1930s and early 1940s.[4]

Possibly because The Fashion Group, a New York based operation, was a leading force in the promotion of the American designer, periodicals largely focused on designers based in New York. Except for Hollywood and designers affiliated with studios, the California designers were not promoted during the 1930s.[5] When America met her American designers through the popular press, she met her New York designers.

America Meets Her Designers. Promoting the American Fashion Designer

Promotion of the American designer during the 1930s in periodical articles followed a consistent strategy. Feature articles were published in magazines with wide circulation. The message content was consistent, regarding the role of the designer, across the continuum of both time and publications. In a time without television, 1930s consumer magazines presented the public with a powerful and pervasive form of mass communication and were arguably more powerful than movies in imparting detailed, factual information about a topic to a broad audience. For example, Collier's, a general-interest weekly magazine which published numerous articles during this period about American fashion and the designer, was "aimed at a large popular audience. 'The nation's weekly' was intent on serving the

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[4] Donahue, 110-114.

[5] "Movietone," Harper's Bazaar, February 1933, 65, 101;Adrian, Gilbert, "Setting Styles through the Stars," Ladies Home Journal, February 1933, 10-11, 40; Eleanor Kinsella McDonnell, "Fashion and the Hollywood Handicap," The Saturday Evening Post, 18 May 1933, 10-11, 42,46; Courtland Holdom, "Hollywood's Fashion Parade," Christian Science Monitor Weekly Magazine, 22 January 1936, 8-9, 15; Edgar Lloyd Hampton, "A 1,200 Mile Style Parade," Nation's Business, April 1937, 78-90. NOTE: An article about the California market, separate from Hollywood, was published post Nazi occupation in September of 1940: "Los Angeles Becomes Style Center," Business Week, 14 September 1940, 42-44.

mainstream public interest...."[6] Collier's became increasingly popular during the 1920s and 1930s due to the quality and diversity of writers and topics, with a readership increasing over one hundred percent from 1917 to World War II.[7]

Figure 1: A sketch of an Elizabeth Hawes design. Basic design direction and silouette are shown, but specific details were not emphasized to prevent potential copying. "Color Mix-Up." Collier's. September 1938, 20.

Magazine promotion provided a combination of visual and written information to tell the story. To this end, promotion of American designers to the public during the 1930s in consumer magazines included a unique and powerful visual dimension not present in other formats such as radio or career literature. While specific clothing was seldom photographed or publicized, most likely for fear of copying, images of the designers were. Virginia Pope, fashion editor of The New York Times wrote:

> There is no fanfare of trumpets when ...designers...show a collection.... There are no invited guests; only the buyers may penetrate their showrooms. Without fuss and flutter orders are entered on blanks and deliveries promised. It is all very businesslike. And for a reason: so quickly do electric knives cut into material and machines sew up seams, so quickly does the word of a new trend circulate that the American designer must guard herself against the fashion "pirate " who is always lurking around the corner.[8]

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[6] "Collier's," http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG02/NewYorker/colliers.html retrieved December 9, 2004.
[7] "Collier's Weekly," http://www.irelandinformationguide.com/Collier%27s_Weekly. This article noted circulation in 1917 at 1 million copies weekly to over 2.5 million by World War II. With a population of 103,268,000 in 1917, Collier's was read by about 1of about every 100 Americans. With a population of 132,122,446 in 1940, Collier's was read by about 1 out of every 50 Americans. Population information was retrieved from www.infoplease.com/year on December 9, 2004.
[8] Virginia Pope, The New York Times Magazine, 21 April 1935, as quoted in Grace Ely, American Fashion Designers, (New York: National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1935), 22.

With design pirates looming, promoting designers fashions was risky. This was especially evident in the visual depictions of designers and their garments. A few articles about American designs included illustrated images of the clothing, with not more than an interpretation of the garment, certainly not enough detail for a copyist to use (see Figure 1), however when actual clothing was part of a promotional photograph, it was obscured either by camera angle or lighting (for example see Figures 8, 11, 12, 16 and 17). With the mission of promoting American design, a strategy ensued. It is difficult to determine whether it was a deliberate approach or simply born out of the desire not to show clothes in great detail. In either event, publications consistently highlighted the designer, providing name and face recognition to the reader along with biographies and anecdotes on style and design philosophy. Often, clothing was described in terms of a designer's creative use of materials or color, but the particulars were hardly ever disclosed. For example, Muriel King was promoted as one of the first American designers to rely entirely on U.S. designed and produced textiles for her collections.[9] In the same article, Clare Potter was described as doing "striking things with combinations of colors, and has scored with such novelties as bamboo buttons...."[10] Other designers were described as using unconventional materials such as dish towels, mattress ticking, horse blankets or ball fringe in unexpected, new ways to create original garments.[11] But very little of this innovation in clothing was photographed. Visual emphasis was placed on the designer, the person, not the clothing.

In Those Glorious Glamour Years, author Margaret J. Bailey wrote "Glamour encompasses fantastic sets, expert lighting, perfect make-up, a beautiful coiffure, and much,

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[9] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," Fortune, 1933 December, 38.
[10] "Dressmakers of the U.S.," 140.
[11] Selma Robinson, "They Have Your Number," Collier's, 24 March 1934, 24.

much more."[12] Bailey's book was filled with images of stars photographed with this technique. Taking a lead from Hollywood glamour photography, designers were lit, posed, elegantly coiffed with flawless make-up and distinguished clothing. Using principles of design –color, light, line, shape, space and texture – as an initial point for exploration, several images from the magazine articles were examined for their visual content. The specific elements of line, light and space emerged as the most useful for this inquiry.[13] The dominant figure within the space of each photograph was the designer. For example, in Figure 4, designer Elizabeth Hawes was featured in a back lit dramatic pose. Although the mannequin was present, the nature of the photograph was more promotional, as she was not engaged in work. The light reflected from the mannequin to highlight her facial features. In Figure 3, Clare Potter, lighted from the upper left, sat in a contemplative pose dramatically surrounded by piles of fabric, with her face as the most brightly lit element of the composition. Likewise, in Figure 5, designer Lisbeth was lit from the lower right, highlighting a stack of sketches with emphasis, again, upon her face, details of the sketches subdued. Figures 6 through 11 further represent photographic depiction of the designer in the 1930s. Most photographs depicted the designer in some phase of the work process, visually defined in one of three ways; draping, sketching or fitting to live models. And some of the designers were photographed working while wearing a hat and even gloves (Figures 7 and 10).

In Figure 12, designer Clare Potter sat on the floor fitting the hem of a model while wearing dangling bracelets, large earrings and necklace. And in Figure 17 Nettie Rosenstein was fitting a model wearing a double strand of pearls. A polished, glamorous appearance was

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[12] Margaret J. Bailey, Those Glorious Glamour Years, (Syracuse, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1982), 7.
[13] Ann Marie Fiore and Patricia Anne Kimle, Understanding Aesthetics, (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1997).

stressed visually and the emphasis was on the individual. Against this, however, career literature from the same era clearly described the role of the designer as managerial, with only part of the function devoted to product development.

Absent from these photographs were images of other people involved in the process. The dress industry was estimated as a $1billion industry by two authors, as a $7 billion industry by Elizabeth Hawes, and as an $8 billion industry by yet a fourth source.[14] And the industry was not only discussed in terms of revenue, but also in terms of size; the International Ladies Garment Workers Union as 220,000-250,000 members strong;[15] number of establishments; and number of designs generated by each company – 200 to 450 designs each year with an estimated output of 26,000-58,500 new designs generated annually, each design mass produced to supply the nation's various department stores.[16] However, visual depictions of designers at work rarely included other people, except perhaps with a fitting model or a client (Figures 8, 9, 11, 16 and 17). Understandably the most visually familiar aspects of the designer's world were chosen for photographs. Sketching, draping or fitting were all visual touchstones readers could identify with as uniquely part of the dressmaking process, while a picture of a designer with a clipboard or meeting with a staff might possess little specific meaning to someone from outside the day-to-day process.

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[14] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 37; Kyle Crichton, "Dress Parade," Collier's, 11 April 1936, 93; Elizabeth Hawes, "New Women Make New Styles," Scribner's Magazine, 1931 September, 298; "Mrs. Graham Buys a New Dress," Good Housekeeping, April 1939, 105. NOTE: Discrepancy among figures in the various articles might be due to wholesale prices versus value of goods at retail. Authors did not cite or note the source of their figures. Variance in revenue figures is also likely due to industries reported, meaning that lower figures might refer to exclusively to the dress business, while larger figures could refer to combined industries such as dress, sportswear, coats, suits, accessories, etc.

[15] Crichton, 50.

[16] Aimee Larkin, "Made in America," Collier's, 18 October 1930, 14, 29; "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 39.

Clare Potter, clever American designer who works out her designs in fabric

Grace Arcuri prefers to pin her creations onto a swinging dressmaker's dummy

Figure 2: Examples of various work processes – Clare Potter, Natalie Renke and Grace Arcuri. "Dress Parade." Collier's. 11 April 1936, 43.

Figure 3: Clare Potter. "So You Want to be a Designer." Ladies Home Journal. March 1935, 24. Used with permission of the publisher.

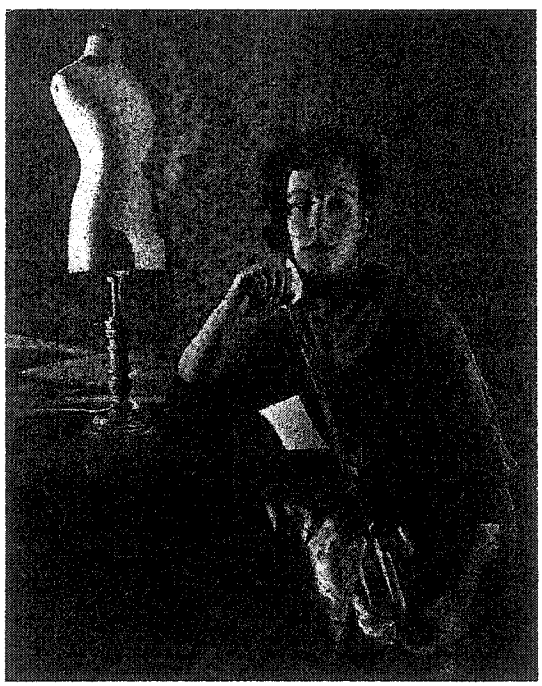

Figure 4: Elizabeth Hawes. "These Designing Young Americans." Independent Woman. September 1935, 298. Provided courtesy of the Business and Professional Women Foundation USA.

Figure 5: Lisbeth Von Kraus. "So You Want to be a Designer." Ladies Home Journal. March 1935, 24. Used with permission of the publisher.

Figure 6: Dorine Abrade. "So You Want to be a Designer." Ladies Home Journal. March 1935, 24. Used with permission of the publisher.

Figure 7: Margot De Bruyn Kopps. "So You Want to be a Designer." Ladies Home Journal. March 1935, 23. Used with permission of the publisher.

Figure 8: Helen Cookman. "So You Want to be a Designer." Ladies Home Journal. March 1935, 25. Used with permission of the publisher.

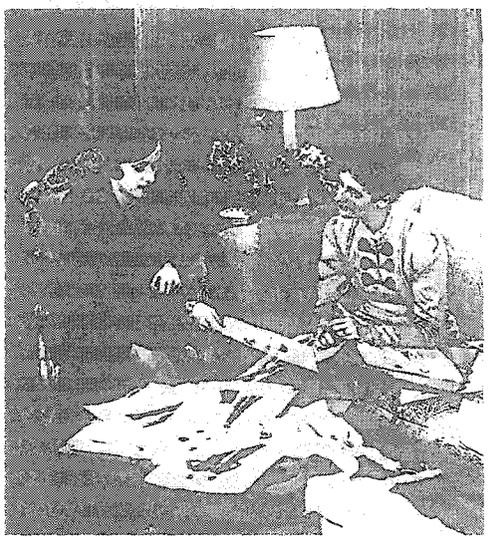

Figure 9: Muriel King. "The Dressmakers of the U.S." Fortune. December 1933, 36. Photographed for Fortune by Paul Hesse. Available courtesy of MPTV.net.

Figure 10: Muriel King. "These Designing Young Americans." Independent Woman. September 1935, 299. Provided courtesy of the Business and Professional Women Foundation USA.

Figure 11: Adele Smithline (Simpson). "So You Want to be a Designer." Ladies Home Journal. March 1935, 25. Used with permission of the publisher.

Figure 12: Clare Potter.
"American Designers." Good Housekeeping. September 1938, 56.

Figure 13: Helen Cookman.
"American Designers." Good Housekeeping. September 1938, 56.

Figure 14: Elizabeth Hawes.
"American Designers." Good Housekeeping. September 1938, 57.

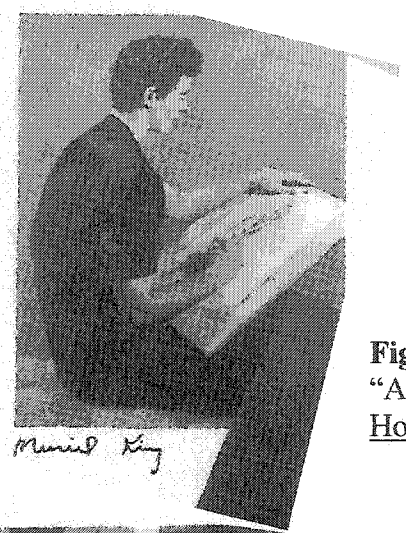

Figure 15: Muriel King.
"American Designers." Good Housekeeping. September 1938, 56.

Figure 16: Germaine Montiel.
"American Designers." Good Housekeeping. September 1938, 57.

Figure 17: Nettie Rosenstein.
"American Designers." Good Housekeeping. September 1938, 57.

In 1938 Good Housekeeping published a two-page spread of American designers featuring still photographs of designers sketching, draping or fitting (see Figures 11 through 16). As in previous articles, the photographs were posed and professionally lit and the blank, white backgrounds behind several women indicated that the shots were taken on a staged set versus an actual work environment. Added to this composition was yet another trapping of celebrity glamour – the autograph. Each photograph was accompanied with the designer's signature, just as if they were celebrities.[17]

In addition to the visual portrayal, the story of the American designer was articulated in text as simultaneously American, feminine, original, practical, managerial and wealthy. The stereotype of poor immigrant laborers toiling in sweatshop working conditions was countered with stories and images of designers as American, well-educated and refined women. Questions of bootlegging, piracy, and American clothing being merely copies of French designs were answered with accounts of originality and creative inspiration coming from many sources. And a legacy of dressmakers as tradeswomen in the employ of wealthy women of society was offset with images wealthy, managerial women positioned as authorities on good taste and creators of style.

American

In November of 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President of the United States and soon after his inauguration, enacted a sweeping plan of reform – The New Deal – designed to relieve the nation of extensive economic depression. Foreign relations were held at a lower priority than domestic concerns and "he was for the time being a thoroughgoing

[17] "American Designers," Good Housekeeping, 1938 September, 56-57.

isolationist."[18] In his inaugural address, Roosevelt was quoted, "...our international trade relations, though vastly important, are in point of time and necessity secondary to the establishment of a sound national economy."[19]

America and its recovery, at least in the earliest years of his Presidency, was the principal focus of Roosevelt's administration. Though this was not without controversy, there was a renewed optimism and a hope among many Americans that The New Deal with its various relief elements would coax prosperity. It was perhaps this influence that encouraged the promotion of American designers as "Americans."[20] Even Vogue declared "Nationalism is the fetish of the day."[21] This patriotism was spurred by an economic necessity. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930, originally intended to guard American farmers against agricultural imports from abroad, became a channel for raising tariffs in all economic sectors.[22] Being American and buying American became necessary and popular. In the promotional text of the American designers, these women did not generically reside and work in New York, but were "from" someplace – a place that spoke of American roots.

For example, Murial King was from Seattle, Washington. Clare Potter "rides horses and raises Dalmatians on a farm in Rockland County, New York, near New Jersey where she was born.[23] Alice Smith was a "Southern girl."[24] Authors made a point of pledging an

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[18] David M. Kennedy, Freedom from Fear, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 158.
[19] Kennedy, 388.
[20] In 1929, while still the First Lady of New York, Eleanor Roosevelt is reported to have been present for the initial organizational discussions of The Fashion Group. (The Fashion Group archive finding aide retrieved from page 11, <http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/spe/rbk/faids/fgi.pdf>). While this association did not receive a footnote among Mrs. Roosevelt's career and life achievements [Eleanor Roosevelt, The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961)] it is, none the less, an intriguing association given the consistent mention of "Americanism" of various designers.
[21] "New York Couture," Vogue, 15 April 1933, 33.
[22] "Smoot-Hawley Tariff," U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/id/17606.htm> (11 February 2005).
[23] "The Dressmaker's of the U.S.," 140.

adopted nationalism to those "American" designers who were foreign born. For example, Dorine Abrade, it was written, although born in northern Italy, "is an American citizen."[25] And Germaine Monteil, though born in Paris, had designed in the United States throughout her entire career. She came to America as a dancer and through designing her own clothing and costumes, launched a new career in apparel design.[26] Josette de Lima, while born in France, took her training in design, not in France under the guidance of the great *couture*, but in New York. And the name of the designer Lisbeth had a telling evolution. Three articles were published in the mid-thirties in which this designer was promoted. She went by Lisbeth von Krausz, then by Lisbeth von Kraus – dropping the ethnic "z." And in yet a third article her last name was dropped all together, and was billed simply as "Lisbeth."[27]

Feminine

Author Selma Robinson observed that, given a population as large and as expanding as America's, all women were not created equal – some were glamour girls, garden-club presidents or young mothers, taking up many walks of life. But, all, according to Robinson, were feminine, with certain elements of femininity they wished to highlight and express. True style, after all, was not a product of empirical physical beauty, but was more about using what one had to the best advantage, wearing proper clothing to fit one's particular type as the secret.[28] Without specifically drawing upon classic beauty as an attribute, authors described the physicality of the designer with emphasis on smallness, thinness, being petite

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[24] Reed, 300.
[25] Coburn, 24.
[26] Waters, 337.
[27] Robinson, "They Have Your Number," 24; Ely, 30; Julia Coburn, "So You Want to be a Designer," Ladies Home Journal, 1935 March, 24.
[28] Designers of the 1930s emerged as arbiters of taste and style through a platform of education to the American woman on proper dress. In a section to follow, these strategies will be expanded upon.

in stature, or behaving in a feminine manner. For example, "Alice Smith made her reputation creating a feminine type of spectator sports clothes. She is very feminine herself – blonde, a Southern girl....She works her ideas out on paper, making delicate little color sketches."[29] There was never a specific definition of femininity, but descriptions revolved around size – stature. In the same article, Elizabeth Hawes was described as "a small dynamic young woman," Clare Potter was "tall, slim and vivid."[30] Selma Robinson provided sort of a generic account of American designers:

> Usually she is under thirty, or very little above it, and usually she is pretty, well-educated, poised, sophisticated, intelligent, chic. You would not be able to distinguish her from any other well-dressed young woman five or six years out of college. Her stride is just as free, her throat as slender, her hips as narrow and her shoulders as broad.[31]

Adjectives such as "petite" was used to describe Germaine Monteil, "short" for Nettie Rosenstein, "pale, slim....[with] yellow curls" for Hattie Carnegie.[32] Gladys Parker was described as "small, colorful....and vivacious," Margot De Bruyn Kops was "diminutive" and Adele Smith was described as a "tiny person."[33]

Throughout the pages of fashion magazines such as Vogue or Harper's Bazaar, the emphasis concentrated on "chic" as the desired quality to achieve through proper dress. Smallness or petite-ness was not particularly promoted. Why was this an important element of the depiction of the American designer in the popular press? One possible explanation was that the celebration and promotion of women who worked, holding leadership positions – even in a traditionally feminine sphere such as fashion –needed to function within

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[29] Ruth Brown Reed, "These Designing Young Americans," Independent Woman, 1935 September, 300.
[30] Reed, 300.
[31] Robinson, "They Have Your Number," 24.
[32] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 41, 140.
[33] Coburn, 22-24.

acceptable, unthreatening boundaries. American women needed to feel that these hard-working designers were not distant career women but people just like them with the same interests and lifestyles. Also, a woman working for wages was still not completely accepted in all circles. Emphasis needed to be placed on a woman's ability to retain her femininity in order to gain acceptance.

If femininity was relative to size, and these women were small, then, perhaps, they were less threatening, more likeable and seemed less overpowering to American women. For example, in an interview with Clare Potter, Selma Robins wrote:

> She feels about them much as they themselves do. Like them, she drives her own car. Or messes in her garden. Or invites friends in for dinner at home. [34]

Possibly operating on the assumption that American women wanted to buy attractive clothing from attractive people, the American designer of the 1930s was consistently described as such. Juxtaposed with this physical attractiveness were words such as "dynamic," "free," "colorful," and "vivacious." Along with a feminine manner there was also an air of being independent, modern, and her own person.

Original

In addition to femininity, the American designer possessed taste and style, and an original flair. Edna Woolman Chase wrote in an editorial about fashion and business that "without taste, [a woman] might, perhaps, make a great success in banking, in insurance, in medicine, in bookkeeping, even in acting. Lots of money has been made in Hollywood, you know, on a minimum of taste. But, if she wants to become an authority in the fashion field,

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[34] Selma Robinson, "Designs on You," Collier's, 2 December 1939, 14.

taste is her greatest asset."[35] But in addition to having taste, the American designer was promoted as original, with ideas coming from places and experiences other than copying styles from France. Murial King used nature – bark, leaves, flowers, sea shells – for inspiration.[36] Clare Potter was celebrated for her use of color of inspiration:

> In the midst of a business conference last September, she stopped talking yardage and costs with Charles Nudelman, her boss, to exclaim with delight over the effect of Mr. Nudelman's red pencil as it lay on his yellow blotter; you'll see it this season in red flowers printed on gold-colored silk. The farm in Nyack where she makes her year-round home is not merely a place where flowers grow and the retaining wall forever needs looking after; it is a source of endless color combinations.[37]

Inspiration for design was described as coming from many sources other than Paris. Jessie Franklin Turner used textiles and other materials as her source of inspiration and designed her own fabrics.[38] Others worked from a wide range of influences including the fabric, the personality of a particular client or a popular play set in an historical period.[39] Elizabeth Hawes proclaimed that the very spirit of the times – *zeitgeist* – entered into a designer's inspiration.[40]

Style introduction and how fashions were set was discussed. Instead of a mysterious prophecy, handed down arbitrarily by an elite few at the top of the fashion world, style change and design was presented as a natural process of observation. Several articles illustrated examples of how a world occurrence placed a spotlight in a particular direction and designers from various vantage points interpreted what they observed into unique,

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[35] Edna Woolman Chase, "The Business of Fashion," Vogue, 1 May 1932, 41.
[36] "American Designers," 56.
[37] Robinson, "Designs on You," 14.
[38] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 38.
[39] Robinson, "They Have Your Number," 33
[40] Elizabeth Hawes, "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," Magazine of Art, April 1937, 231 & 233.

relevant creations. Franklin Clark relayed a story about how Princess Elizabeth of England photographed while out walking with her nanny, wearing a little yellow dress, set a fashion that particular spring for yellow dresses among women for all ages. And the various components of the industry – designers, textile manufacturers and department stores – mobilized to promote the new color.[41] In an article in Good Housekeeping in 1939, the author followed the fictitious musings of a woman, Mrs. Graham, who wished to buy a new dress in a very certain shade of 'cactus green.' To her amazement, Mrs. Graham found exactly what she was looking for. The article continued to illustrate how various industry efforts went into promoting that particular shade of green for the spring season, so very subtly, to the women of America:

> For Mrs. Graham has been subconsciously led by them [industry promoters] to think in terms of the new green, a fresh clean color that makes her want to own it. For months high-style magazines have been full of it. Department-store advertisements have hinted at it broadly. Seductive looking mannequins in shop windows have suggested deliciously how well she would look in it. By the time she is ready to buy her new frock, her mind, though she may not suspect it, has been logically made up for her.[42]

And Paris was noted as yet one more source of inspiration, not copying line for line, but using the collections as a starting point and developing "variations on the theme," making changes and creating new styles which more suited the American market.[43] "Those who create for us see that we have what we want, no matter what Paris says."[44] It was consistently reiterated to the reader that American designers gathered inspiration and design guidance from many sources and used it to develop garments most appropriate for the needs of American women.

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[41] Franklin S. Clark, "Who Sets Fashions – and How?" Review of Reviews, January 1930, 53-54.
[42] "Mrs. Graham Buys a New Dress," Good Housekeeping, April 1939, 27.
[43] Crichton, 43.
[44] Larkin, 29.

Practical

The scales between practicality and originality, however, needed to be in balance to appeal to the enormous American trade. Adele Smithline warned "that it [wasn't] profitable to be too original."[45] And while authors proclaimed the originality in using unusual and non-traditional materials, this spoke as much to the designer's ability to be practical and original. For the Great Depression permeated the nation and the American designer emerged during a period when people, businesses, everyone, had to accomplish more with less and often do without.

It was not only practicality in use of material that was praised, but practicality in design was also a special characteristic. One writer explained:

> But these young American designers were really turning out clothes with an air. Their things were young, casual, admirably suited to American women – to the American tempo of living. They were concentrating on line and fabric, not depending on gee-gaws to put their designs over.[46]

Mass production, for the most part, dictated a limitation of embellishment. Ornamentation required either custom manufacturing or importing from Paris, both options being extremely expensive. Then the added steps required in production also added cost to the garment, so the result was concentration on excellent fabric and attention to the lines of the garment and doing without "expensive doodads."[47]

Managerial

"They take their work seriously – so seriously that everything they hear and see is translated into clothes."[48] The designer was highlighted as a skilled, professional individual.

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[45] Coburn, 25.
[46] Reed, 298-299.
[47] The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 38-39.
[48] "They Have Your Number," 33.

At no time was she depicted as flighty, eccentric or otherwise idiosyncratic. The emphasis of promotional efforts was to acquaint and educate the reader about the American apparel industry through promotion of the designer and to inspire confidence in the industry's ability to meet the needs of the American consumer. Processes of design development were emphasized to show how much work, thought and talent went into development of American clothing. Threaded through this commentary were glimpses of necessary managerial and business savvy. Designers were promoted as intelligent and focused. For example, Helen Cookman was described as having "business brains as well as the creative force."[49] And Nettie Rosenstein personally reviewed potential retailers and hand-picked the ones best suited financially, with proper locations and merchandising, to appropriately showcase her designs.[50] One author offered the following description to young would-be designers:

> Have you the tact and finesse of a diplomat? The poise and calm of a Buddha? Creative talent and imagination? An appreciation for line and color? Have you the ability to get along well with people, and capacity to work like a Trojan?....What's this – a word picture for a super being? Nothing of the sort, dear reader – these are just some of the important qualifications for a career as a costume designer.[51]

Design was not an entry level position in the apparel trade, but something to be aspired to after years of experience and dedication.[52] Contrary to information about the profession conveyed in both career literature and fictional accounts, the popular press placed more emphasis on the designer as a creative force and arbiter of style and good taste. Readers were treated to information about how the designer chose to work – either through draping or sketching. But information was not included about the size of each designer's business, supervisory responsibilities or other parts of the process in addition to the creative process.

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[49] Coburn, 25.
[50] "Profiles: Nettie Rosenstein – Very Terrific, Very Divine," New Yorker, 19 October 1940, 28.
[51] Waters, 324.
[52] Waters, 337.

The promotion of the designer in popular press publications focused on the individual, celebrating her creative abilities. As a result, the business aspect of the story went mostly untold.

Creating clothing was not presented to the public as a mystic affair, but as a specific process with defined stages. Entire articles were dedicated to outlining the process, step by step, of creating and manufacturing as a framework of promoting American designers. For example, designer Elizabeth Hawes authored an eight-point process and provided a series of photographs depicting each stage in "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born."[53] Her position was that good design was in response to the needs of a society and not limited to certain geography. The idea that a designer would be considered good based on being French or American was a moot argument to her. And in "Dress Parade" by Kyle Crichton, a variety of designers were used to illustrate the wholesale design and manufacturing process.

Authors also described general industry configuration, such as specializations within the industry with regard to type of garment (coats, suits, sportswear, etc.) and also specialization in pricing.[54] And while a few articles did discuss the extravagancies of a trip to Paris to see the fashion openings, this popular press version of the designer was not as much of a "see and be seen" personality attending posh restaurants and exclusive parties. While other modes of popular culture, such as film, fiction and career literature, highlighted the social aspect of the designer's world, consumer periodicals did not. The designer worked very hard. She was the "Queen Bee" of the industry.[55]

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[53] Elizabeth Hawes, "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," 230-234.
[54] Larkin, 29.
[55] "Mrs. Graham Buys a New Dress," 105.

Wealthy

"It is a profession that is new, unlimited and rich," wrote one reporter about the American fashion designer.[56] Perhaps to provide credibility or celebrity to the role of the designer, salary and other compensation were repeatedly remarked upon. Specific salaries were rarely disclosed. In fact one reporter noted that it was "impossible to get anyone in the field to name an average income for the more successful designers."[57] But design was consistently depicted as a very well-paying position, not just among jobs open to women, but a very lucrative career in general. And the question was posed: Why would an American designer, as accomplished as a French designer, forego the fame and notoriety one could achieve in France and continue to work in the American industry? After all, several "French" designers were from other countries including Mainbocher (Main Rousseau Bocher), American born from Chicago, Norman Hartnell, who was British, and Elsa Schiaparelli who was Italian, to name three.[58] The answer was money:

> But why do they stay? The answer is simple and quite sufficient. They do not make the glamorous names that they might make in Paris, but they earn just as much money as the Parisians, perhaps more. And how many can be expected to give up a lucrative opportunity close at hand for the possibility of a more glamorous opportunity elsewhere, particularly when there is no likelihood of greater financial return?[59]

But the American designer was not necessarily born into wealth. She was often depicted as coming from a common background, much like her American customers, and used skill and hard work to develop a career. Several designers were described as having made clothes for their dolls or other family members as children or worked their way into

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[56] Reed, 300.
[57] Dorothy Mines Waters, "Are You Designing Your Career?," Independent Woman, 1940 October, 337.
[58] Reed, 299.
[59] "Dressmakers of the U.S." 39.

design after entering the apparel profession to support family and children. 'Regular people' were making clothes for the average women of America – this was an underlying message. But they were regular people who had developed a chic and sophistication and who were earning very lucrative salaries. Salaries were reported as "high" for those who had reached the top levels of the profession, one article reporting as high as $50,000 and half-interest in the manufacturing firm.[60] And they were regular people who enjoyed exotic vacations to places like Greece, and Bermuda, enjoying interesting hobbies, like watercolor painting, horseback riding and breeding Dalmatians.[61] However, each of these trips and hobbies contributed to their work and inspiration in some way and were depicted as important activities to their development as designers.

Demystifying the French Mystique

Authors challenged the relevant importance of Paris as the seat of style leadership by consistently putting Paris' role as a fashion and style leader in perspective, discounting its *mystique*. "No locality has the monopoly on any of the arts, dress design included, and only a boob could suppose that Paris possesses deep secrets of drapery which are not available elsewhere."[62] And designer Elizabeth Hawes chimed in with this sentiment by stating that there was really no such thing as 'American' design, with good design not necessarily a product of geographical boundaries but of "style evolution and social need."[63]

Ethel Traphagen dubbed Paris' reign over women's style "The French Fashion Factory" and explained its role passionately:

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[60] Crichton, 50.
[61] "Mrs. Graham Buys a New Dress," 106.
[62] "Dressmakers of the U.S.," 39.
[63] Reed, 299.

> Do those American women who parrot French propaganda which they unsuspectingly absorb from every newspaper and magazine, have any conception of what the 'rare' taste was that dictated these new fashions of 1930 which they call 'graceful' and 'charming?' A gang of cold-blooded business men met to decide what the women of Christendom should wear during the coming season; these are the compelling forces – the voices – the crew that hearken to the silk mill owners howling that short skirts are decreasing their yardage ruinously; the designers shrieking that unless a radical change is effected, they will starve; the merchants short-sightedly demanding different and more expensive styles to sell. No man among them asks what the world's women want – what science – what art, wants. They only ask, 'What do our pockets want?'....Are comfort, health, taste, time and money to be given up to gratify the greed of the Fashion Factory.[64]

And these French styles, according to Traphagen, "clash[ed] utterly with the times and the customs of our country – to wit these bedraggled rags that so readily catch in street cars, automobiles, doors or pieces of furniture."[65]

Other authors were as emphatic, albeit less passionate, about Paris' role in American fashion. In a 1930 Collier's article "Made in America," author Aimee Larkin expressed, in defense of the unsung American designer, that "[the American women] lays her chic at the door of Paris, though the imports sold and the exact copies made in this country wouldn't butter a muffin in the trade."[66] Another author attributed Paris' fashion rule to four factors; the finest ideas, the finest materials, the finest workmanship and the loudest ballyhoo, the American industry possessing all but the 'ballyhoo:'

> And in the opinion of many, publicity is all that is needed to give the U.S. *haute couture* a wide reputation under its own name. Alone among U.S. enterprises, it has been denied the characteristic American ballyhoo.[67]

This author went on to muse about this "curious absence of ballyhoo among U.S. designers, in the nation which coined the term *Barnumize*!"[68]

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[64] Ethel Traphagen, "The French Fashion Factory," The North American Review, 1930 January, 21-22.
[65] Traphagen, 20.
[66] Larkin, 14.
[67] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 40.

In terms of product promotion, several authors exposed the French system as somewhat parasitic, its patronage vain, with the success of the whole business resting upon a group of "fifty or sixty women of social or financial fame who make a career out of dressing well."[69] Traphagen wrote of a society woman who was given a wardrobe of gowns by a French *modiste* to wear and be seen in, along with a number of other celebrities such as actresses, movie stars and "needy aristocrats...used...to turn the masses into sheep."[70] Gilbert Adrian alluded to the life of an American woman as busy, active, filled with worthy activities, he wrote that an American woman wanted to be attractive by way of "short cut. She hasn't time to concentrate on being visual all day long, as the French women do."[71]

In this vein, there was an ever present dismay at the idea that the French were more qualified to design clothing for American women than other American women. In 1934, Hollywood designer Gilbert Adrian wrote:

> I cannot see how any American woman can avoid the common sense of looking to America for her clothes. It is the most natural thing in the world. American designers know her life, and the way she wants to dress for it. They have stretched on her beaches, danced on her country clubs, sailed in her boats, met the men she is out to capture. More important still, they know and understand her peculiarly American attitude toward dress.[72]

And with the sub-heading "Only an American Understands," author Selma Robinson wrote "...there are nuances of American life that only an American can comprehend."[73] France was repeatedly being discounted as a practical source for clothing for the "average"

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[68] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 39.
[69] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 37.
[70] Traphagen, 21.
[71] Gilbert Adrian, "Do American Women Want American Clothes," Harper's Bazaar, 1934 January, 37.
[72] Adrian, 37.
[73] Robinson, "They Have your Number," 33.

American woman. France was a worthy source for the elite, but not for the needs of the masses:

> It is curious, when you stop to think of it, that 45,000,000 women in the U.S. should depend on Paris for the style of their clothing. Paris is three thousand miles of ocean away and inhabited by a race of strikingly different temperament.[74]

Demand for clothing in America created an argument of "apples to oranges" where France was concerned. The French market was described as "concentrating on dressing a few women who could afford the money and the time to make a career out of looking wonderful."[75] And in 1937, Elizabeth Hawes, who had lived in France and worked for the celebrated clientele, observed:

> The American feminine public demanding clothes is not a simple matter of a few hundred or even a few thousand women of unlimited means. There are millions of American women who want and can buy a considerable number of clothes.[76]

French *couture* and the cosmopolitan women who patronized it endured the time and effort required to generate such creations. This Paris was "a very small city" catering to an elite group. But in America there was a greater demand due to a vastly larger population of women who could afford to dress reasonably well and who did not have the time or patience to wait.[77] Even in the midst of the Great Depression it was reported that "the U.S. demand for clothes is terrific: depression or no, the U.S. continues to be the No. 1 market for any civilized item you care to name."[78]

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[74] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 37.
[75] "Profiles," 28
[76] Hawes, "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," 230.
[77] Larkin, 11.
[78] "The Dressmaker's of the U.S.," 39.

Because of U.S. mass production, fashion became more democratic and more available. Greater numbers of women could participate in fashion and style compared to even the middle class women of France. The New Yorker observed:

> [The] wholesale ready-to-wear industry...succeeded in making any little manicurist in a $16.50 dress look just about as well as any little heiress in a $250 model. The average American woman is the best-dressed average woman in the world."[79]

And this same article continued to explain, "...actually a middle-class Parisienne with a middling income looks fairly middling, if not downright dowdy. She has never known the purely American pleasure of walking into a shop in one dress and walking out in another."[80] Elizabeth Hawes supported this by explaining that most French women of average means had one black dress that was worn day after day, even year after year.[81]

The American industry brought style to the masses, without the help of what was depicted as an outmoded French system of disseminating style to the elite. The U.S. industry boasted nearly 1,500 firms, as early as 1930, and as many as 7,000 firms by the end of the decade, producing tens of thousands of models each year distributed nationwide in modern department stores.[82] Although there were 100s of Paris houses, the French operation was described as having about 20-25 top designers, each producing and retailing their collections individually, amounting to what appeared to be about 4-5,000 new models total. This portrayal sounded old and outmoded, not suited to the sheer demand of Americans:

> During the post-War [World War I] boom, however, the U.S. acquired such an appetite for finery that the Paris haute couture, for the first time in its history, could

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[79] "Profiles," 28.
[80] "Profiles," 28.
[81] Hawes, "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," 231.
[82] Larkin, 14; "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 39.

> not meet the demand. Paris designers could not design fast enough. Paris seamstresses could not sew fast enough.[83]

And another interesting argument was raised by one author on the elevation of original American design after World War I with more stylish and influential women of society. Copying French designs for middle-class and low-end manufacturers were at a high-point during the economic boom following World War I, and women of true style found it "positively dangerous...to buy a French costume on Fifth Avenue. A month later she would see burlesques of her dress bulging and heaving on ungainly shapes all over the city."[84] Because American designs were not as appealing to copyists as the French designs, according to this author women of true distinction developed a specific preference for the product of American designers.

There was certainly an attempt to impress the American reader by the out-and-out size of the industry. Although market share numbers varied from writer to writer, as did gross revenue from the business, and even number of firms in the industry, all figures were reported in the context of huge scale, vastness and power. Aligned early in its development with the department store, the U.S. designer enterprise had a larger reach than the French business.[85]

One author, without directly scoffing at the traditional French elegance or artistry, proclaimed that the American designer was "unhampered by tradition," using all sorts of everyday materials such as dishrags, laundry rope or a table cloth to achieve "magical application." Probably horrific to a French designer, this pioneering, adventuresome aspect of American design supposedly ranked American designers as even more talented than the

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[83] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 39.
[84] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 40.
[85] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 39.

French, able to make "smart clothes out of anything, from the richest fabrics to whatever comes handy."[86]

The American Fashion Designer as Educator on Proper Dress and Good Taste

Lists of tips and suggestions emerged in periodical literature, giving readers anecdotal, succinct guidelines on dressing well and building a sensible, chic and stylish wardrobe with a budget in mind.[87] Designers offered advice and commentary on fashion and style to the consumer. The advice was practical with guidelines about the best design lines to choose for specific figure problems and tips to avoid fads in order to economize and stretch one's clothing budget, while still maintaining style.[88]

The selection of clothing and the process of style change were explained – demystified for the general consumer. Hawes and Potter each commented on how fashion trends developed and emerged.[89] Clare Potter explained:

> Fashion moves like a snail, not a greyhound....Fashion changes almost imperceptibly, one season a neckline, another a new sleeve, or a lowered waistline, until in a few seasons you have a really altered silhouette....It's not that the wholesale designers can't change their stuff as radical as anyone else; that would be easier and more fun. But the mass temper resents sudden change.[90]

The more gifted communicators among the noted designers did not just grant interviews to reporters – they wrote their own articles. Elizabeth Hawes launched a lucrative and long-running writing career by offering fashion advice to readers. Others included Ethel

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[86] Robinson, "They Have Your Number," 24.
[87] Alice Stetson Fletcher with Elizabeth Hawes, "Along Your Own Lines," Women's Home Companion, October 1930, 92-92; Robinson "They Have Your Number," 33; Marie Benson Ray, "How Do I Look?," Collier's, 11 August 1934, 18; Avery Strakosch with Valentina, "Not Another Stitch," Collier's, 8 October 1938, 18 & 29.
[88] For example: Robinson, 33; Ray, 18; Fletcher, 92-93.
[89] Elizabeth Hawes "New Women Make New Styles" Schribner's Magazine September 1931, 298-302; Robinson "Designs on You," 14.
[90] Robinson, 32.

Traphagen and Gilbert Adrian who each penned commentary on American designs and the elements of good style as well.

Not all designers, however, held this type of promotion in high regard. A reporter remarked on noted wholesale and retail designer Hattie Carnegie's feelings about designers as educators to the public on fashion and proper dress. She wrote "she dislikes personal publicity and self exploitation; won't go on the radio and won't 'educate' American women by pompous interviews.[91] Carnegie implied that under the pretext of education, American designers were going too far in this campaign for themselves to promote their designs.

Education and Training

Education and training needed by a designer continued to be discussed in the periodical literature. As in other forms of popular culture materials, the responses varied widely. Elizabeth Hawes noted that while opportunity in design was moving more and more toward the needs of mass production, an enormous disconnect was occurring because the training available was still addressing the custom, or retail, business configuration. She argued that designers for mass produced clothing in America were ill equipped to meet the "requirements of fit, use and beauty which every woman had a right to demand."[92] Nettie Rosenstein was self-taught in design by making clothing for her family as a young child, and then evolved her skills into dressmaking for others. And after a brief retirement, in 1927 she went to work for a wholesale house and eventually began her own firm. "She...never had a sewing lesson."[93] Hattie Carnegie was another designer who had no formal training. "She

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[91] Ely, 9.
[92] Hawes, "The American Designer Has Not Yet Been Born," 234.
[93] Waters, 337.

would be unable to cut a pattern if she tried and has never sewed a stitch in her life."[94] But lack of training or technical skill did not inhibit her. She was billed as the most famous single figure in American design and relied mostly on management abilities to achieve her fame. Designs were developed by a staff of designers and her brothers assisted her in managing various parts of the company.[95] Clare Potter expressed that apprenticing was the best way to learn the trade, but that some schooling would be necessary to land the apprenticeship. And Lisbeth Von Kraus scoffed at formal schooling all together to learn design.[96] Helen Cookman never had goals of becoming a designer. Her career was born out of sheer necessity. She began by selling sweaters on commission to support her children. This opportunity evolved into selling coats and then later designing them. Her training occurred in the workplace.[97] Author Selma Robinson listed several designers – Dorothy Cox, Muriel King, Mary Robinson, Marie Leeds, Gladys Parker and Lisbeth Von Kraus – and observed, "...some of the girls took classes in dressmaking; most did not." But she did point out that their backgrounds each included making clothing for themselves and young girls, eventually translating this talent into making clothes for others.[98]

When education was specifically recommended, there was not a clear cut path suggested. Department store training was acclaimed by Harper's Bazaar as the best training ground.[99] Julia Colburn provided a comprehensive overview of the profession in her article "So You Want to be a Designer," and when discussing education, it was clear that among the

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[94] "Dressmakers of the U.S.," 140.
[95] "Dressmakers of the U.S.," 140.
[96] Coburn, 24.
[97] Barbara E. Scott Fisher, "Biographies in Clothes: American Designers," The Christian Science Monitor, 25 May 1940, 8.
[98] Robinson, "They Have Your Number," 24.
[99] "How to Get into the Fashion Business," Harper's Bazaar, August 1939, 51, 141-142.

various options that existed, not one was singled out as preferred or leading to greater career options.[100] Mary Brooks Picken warned that "...opportunities are made by the individual. The girl who believes that a college clothing course is sufficient to put her into a ready-made position with a flattering salary is generally mistaken."[101]

There seemed to be as many ways into the profession as there were designers. The common thread, however, was ability – usually a natural inclination toward clothing or art – and some opportunity to show that talent. Whether it was derived from formal training or developed from self-teaching and natural talent, each designer cultivated a method of working through her ideas and then communicating them to a potential employer through some skill in sketching or draping, cutting and pinning. The profiles presented in popular periodicals spoke very little about background. While design was not entry level work, there was very little information provided on the career paths of individual designers.

More than education, good taste was proclaimed to be the key element of success. According to Claire Potter, "...all you need to become a designer is knowledge of clothes and good taste."[102] While this was a deceptively simple response, Claire Potter seems to have summed it up. A combination of some technical knowledge, acquired from a variety of experiences, and a demonstration of tastefulness seemed to be the key to entering the profession. What demonstrated tastefulness? While good looks or personal grooming were not specifically remarked upon, as they had been in career literature and career fiction, there was an emphasis on smallness or petite-ness. And the photographs of each of the women featured perfectly done hair, make-up and well-accessorized, beautiful clothing. Tasteful

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[100] Coburn, 24-25.
[101] Mary Brooks Picken, "Essentials for Fashion Work," Journal of Home Economics, January 1932, 32.
[102] Fisher, 8.

appearance was not specifically remarked upon as necessary, but it was certainly demonstrated visually.

In 1935 Vogue launched a career competition to the seniors of women's colleges in America. Graduates of the class of 1936 were invited to enter the multi-part essay and quiz competition, with a new series of questions published each month over several months. The competition was called the "Prix de Paris" and Vogue offered the winner a job for one year in their New York and Paris offices. Edna Woolman Chase launched the competition with a letter to potential contestants:

> Every day in the year, young women come to us looking for jobs. Every day in the year, we look for young women who have the ideas and the fashion sense and the balance to keep Vogue fresh, alive, and authoritative. Instinctively, we look with most hope at the college girl with a degree. There are plenty of very intelligent girls who have never been to a university; on the other hand, four years of training do leave their mark – in reliability, in control, in organized thinking. Yet the brightest college girl – the best scholar – is often without the very quality so vitally necessary to a member of the Vogue staff: an innate fashion sense. A sense of excitement of clothes; of their fitness; of their fantasy; of their colour [*author's spelling*] and feel and cut. Above all, a sense of their timeliness. The more intellectual a girl is, the more she is apt to look upon fashion with contempt as a shallow craze, a feminine weakness, a waste of valuable time....[F]ashion dominates every sale – not only of dresses or hats, but of cars and radios and refrigerators. Good taste is no longer a polite formula: It is a vast economic force in the world of to-day.[103]

The contest concluded the following spring and the winners were announced in the July 1, 1936 issue. "Prix de Paris" was such a success that it continued for several more years.[104] While Vogue's career opportunity was primarily in an editorial setting, Mademoiselle launched a competition in March of 1939 called "Design for a Living." Young design students were invited to submit original designs within given specifications and the winning

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[103] Edna Woolman Chase, "Vogue Prix de Paris," Vogue, 1 October 1935, 81.
[104] "Prix de Paris," Vogue, 1 July 1936, 66-67.

garment was produced and marketed by Lord & Taylor.[105] Mademoiselle also introduced another a competition, with the winner receiving a chance to work in a department store for a guaranteed amount of time.

Magazine contests were targeted directly to young girls and seemed to be a way of not only promoting a younger, loyal readership, but also by guiding career direction through example and exercise. Entering a contest gave a young hopeful the experience of following prescribed guidelines of taste, content, presentation, workmanship as well as other qualities, be evaluated, recognized and rewarded on a professional level. It also provided an aspiring designer with a sense of where their talent placed them on a broader scale in a competitive industry.

1940 – A Turning Point in the Promotion of the American Designer

Numerous articles were published in 1940 covering the American apparel industry. With the suppression of communication from Paris due to Nazi occupation in June of 1940, fashion became big news. It would appear that New York assumed the role of "fashion capital" almost by default. The skeptics surfaced, a negative tone arising from many who covered the industry. For example, Business Week reported "that the U.S. fashion trade wears its new crown uneasily."[106] Time editors described the U.S. apparel market as "headed without a rudder toward open sea."[107] In the same article, the author asserted that "[t]he U.S. dress business will soon need more guidance. Otherwise it will not know what to make" and provided a list of promotional events scheduled and then referred to them as "incoherent

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[105] Winner announced in May issue: "Design for a Living Contest," Mademoiselle, May 1939, 67.
[106] "U.S. New Style Center," Business Week, 3 August 1940, 26.
[107] "Clothes: Home Styles," Time, 19 1940, 67.

signs of an emerging U.S. couture...."[108] However, against this argument Fortune, a competing business publication, declared seven years earlier in its 1933 article "The Dressmakers of the U.S." that America had, indeed, a thriving *couture* and faced "a real opportunity to rival Paris, perhaps even replace it as the style source for the...U.S. ladies ready-to-wear business."[109] Time and Business Week were not the only naysayers. While Fortune had championed American design those seven years earlier, it published an article in 1940 by Stanley Marcus, V.P. of Neiman-Marcus, who made a stinging proclamation: "When Paris fell the three-billion-dollar American garment industry lost its source of inspiration and *je ne sais quoi* and must now design for a living."[110] The tone was pessimistic, negating the efforts of American designers. Marcus went on to note:

> All arguments about the merits of American designers are virtually futile because American designers have never been put to the test....Most of the well-known names in the field of American fashion are skillful adaptors who have gained their reputations by their good taste and clever knowledge of what to copy and what to leave alone. [111]

Even some of the more positive attempts to promote and report on the American industry seemed to be devoid of any recognition that American designers had been designing and producing clothing to the American masses for decades. For example, Virginia Pope referred to American design efforts prior to 1940 as "training" and "schooling" with Paris as the teacher.[112] And in the same article, Pope reported:

> Because they contribute their talent to the wholesale field, because their creations go not into one but many stores, they remain anonymous. Only within very

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[108] "Clothes," 68.
[109] "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," 37.
[110] H. Stanley Marcus, "America in Fashion," Fortune, 1940 November, 81.
[111] Marcus, 84-85.
[112] Virginia Pope, "The Fashion Capital Moves Across the Sea," The New York Times Magazine, 18 August 1940, 12.

> recent times have a few stores consented to publicize the names of leading designers.[113]

But, in fact, during the previous decade – 1930 to 1939 – American designers were not banished to complete anonymity. Perhaps their names did not appear in labels, because they did not own the companies. Forty-five designers, from New York and Hollywood, serving the retail, wholesale and millinery fields were photographed and promoted in numerous consumer publications. The publicity of the previous decade seemed to evaporate, this promotion which introduced numerous American designers to the public, which demonstrated the design philosophies, work ethic and backgrounds of these women, and which served to show how Paris was only one of many design resources. This was a sharp turn from the positive, illuminating, confident coverage of the previous ten years.

The tone was altered in other ways as well. Publications such as The New York Times Magazine and Life, which had not covered American design during the previous ten years, reported on the fall showings in New York and, breaking from previous tradition, clothing was shown. Through the feature "Modern Living," Life covered American design several times in 1940 after Paris' occupation. The clothing was shown in beautiful full-color, with many full-page photographs and detailed text descriptions. Retail price information and store location was often given.[114] The strategy seemed to be more about promoting interest and sales in the clothing than the specific designers, at least initially.

Developments in Paris struck a note of panic among many in the dress business. In spite of strenuous efforts during the previous decade to minimize the appearance of Paris'

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[113] Pope, 13.

[114] "Paris-Weaned Designers Spend August in U.S.A. Testing Their Ingenuity," Life, 26 August 1940, 64-65; "New York Fashion Week: Gala Shows Offer 1,000 New Styles," Life, 23 September 1940, 65 & 69; "Fashion Designers Find New Style Ideas in Navy," Life, 28 October 1940, 83-86; "New All-American Fashions: Coast-to-Coast Talent Creates Abundance of Styles," Life, 18 November 1940, 60-63.

role in the creation of clothing for the American public, many professionals involved in the process refused to believe that American designers could be relied upon. But from the commentary on Paris, there seemed to be another reason to laud Paris. Paris was a party.

> Every moment, from the time the gangplank is crossed at the New York end, means something that can't be reckoned in mere dollars....Paris is beautiful. Paris is gay. Paris is full of people who live in an interlude between two stretches of exertion. Paris is the goal of an international set of exotics whose whole code and creed consist in doing everything with a finish that takes no account of time or money.[115]

Virginia Pope recounted with a rather sad longing the experience of attending a Paris show in her first reports for The New York Times Magazine of the August 1940 New York shows:

> The thrill of attending an opening at one of the great houses never grew cold, no matter how often one indulged it. One went through the formality of receiving and answering an engraved invitation, as if to a Duchess's ball....There was always a tremendous hubbub. The clatter of voices mingled with the scraping of chairs as every one jockeyed for a front seat....the drama and novelty and was intense. New colors dawned; silhouettes proclaimed fresh curves; hats showed extravagant angles; jewels illuminated fantastic settings; furs stalked in shades unknown to the jungle....Some guests partook of chilled champagne generously offered. Others sped to the Ritz, to exchange views. In that crowded room the fate of Paris collections was sealed for the American markets.[116]

Going to the annual pilgrimage was a fabulous time and a prestigious perquisite of the fashion echelons. The average bill to attend was reported to be about $5,000.[117] The New York shows were simply no comparison and, being home, not nearly the adventure. The prospect of Paris shows ending was a sad blow. After a quarter of a century of travel to Paris by the American fashion leaders, it was a sad and frightening goodbye to not only a great party but to many friends as well.

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[115] Larkin, 14.
[116] Pope, 12-13.
[117] "America Comes to Seventh Avenue," Fortune, July 1939, 186; "Clothes: Home Styles," Time, 19 August 1940, 67.

If the Americans did too well, the need to go to Paris and participate in the fabulous fashion events might have gone away for good, regardless of how well the French industry fared through the occupation. France eventually recovered from World War I – the Great War. But in 1940, no one knew how long Hitler's reign would endure.

Promotion of the American designer through popular periodical publications appealed to the masses of women, not an elite echelon of women as in France. There was a strident attempt to show women that the designers who created their clothes were just like them – and because the designers were just like any other woman, they could better attend to the tastes and needs of American women than the French. In fact, examples continually directed the reader that France had very little to do with the apparel of American women. American designers used a variety of sources and inspiration. The message to the reader was that regardless of how Paris was promoted, American designers created suitable dress designs, Paris being just one of many sources of inspiration.

While profiles of the designers provided some detail about their work methods and philosophies, personal lives were seldom discussed. Designers were promoted in terms of their own contributions and not marginalized in terms who they were married to, how many children they had, or details about their home, such as how it was decorated or where they lived. Out of 45 designers promoted during the 1930s, there were only three exceptions - Mrs. (Sophie) Gimbel, (first name not mentioned in this context) a designer for Saks was promoted as the wife of Adam Gimbel, the president of the Saks firm; Helen Cookman, who had five children to support; and Clare Potter who lived on a farm in New Jersey. In each instance, however, the particular domestic detail spun back to business strengths. Mrs. (Sophie) Gimbel was coaxed to lend her considerable talents to Saks only because of her

relationship with the President of the firm; Helen Cookman went to work to support her five children, like so many women were required to do, and found her way into design by necessity, opportunity and hard work; and Claire Potter's farm and county life provided endless inspiration for her sportswear and unique color combinations.

A message of confidence was put forth to American women about American designers. They were gifted managers, intelligent business women, creative yet practical. And for their efforts they were very well compensated. Unlike dressmaking, which often placed a woman "for hire" to a wealthier woman of social standing, this new breed of designer was, herself, a woman of social standing and economic means, positioned as a leader of style and fashion authority over the masses of average American women. Designers of the 1930s were empowered with a new identity, arbiters of good taste, style, on the leading edge.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FASHION DESIGNER AND THE AMERICAN MOVIE

During the 1930s the story of the fashion designer emerged in all manner of popular culture, including career literature and popular periodicals. Tapping into popular tastes and trends, screenwriters churned these themes back out to the public by way of feature Hollywood films. Entertaining offerings about the world and work of the fashion designer provided settings for beautiful women, elegant clothing and luxurious décor. These stories included Gowns by Roberta, originally a novel by Alice Duer Miller, then a Broadway musical scored by Jerome Kern entitled Roberta, and soon after a Hollywood film; Street of Women, originally a popular novel by Polan Banks and later a Hollywood film; Fashions of 1934, a Hollywood feature billed as the first real film about designers and models; Vogues of 1938, another Hollywood feature; and Irene, based on a story by James Montgomery, originally produced on Broadway.[1] In its Broadway production, Irene ran for 670 performances beginning November 18, 1919 and for another two weeks from April 2 to April 14, 1923.[2] Its most current Broadway revival was from March 13, 1973 through September 8, 1974. Irene's first Hollywood incarnation was in 1926, repeated again in 1940. What do these films and stories tell us about fashion designers during the 1930s? This chapter examines the fictional constructions of the fashion designer in feature Hollywood films, including emerging themes in the plot and the aesthetics.

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[1] Street of Women, dir. Archie Mayo, 1hr. 49 min., Paramount, 1937, 16mm. film; Fashions of 1934, dir. William Dieterle, 1hr. 20 min., Warner Brothers, 1934, videocassette; Roberta, dir. William A. Seiter, 1hr. 46 min., MGM/UA, 1935, videocassette; Vogues of 1938, dir. Irving Cumings, 1hr. 49 min., Paramount, 1937, videocassette; Irene, dir. Herbert Wilcox, 1hr. 49 min., C&C Films, 1940, 16mm. film; Alice Duer Miller, Gowns by Roberta (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1933); Polan Banks, Street of Women (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Publishers, 1931).

[2] A point of interest and trivia: Irene Dunne, who later starred as designer Princess Stephanie in the film version of Roberta, started her acting career as "Irene" in the traveling troupe of the stage production of Irene in 1923.

In A Woman's View, Jeanine Basinger wrote that the duality of women's roles during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s in Hollywood motion pictures contributed to their ultimate implausibility. She contended that certainly moviegoers, even the youngest, knew that much of what was viewed was "untrue, wishful, escapist." She referred to this as a "joyful conspiracy" between movie maker and moviegoer.[3] With this philosophy, scholarly examination may seem fruitless, for what real perceptions can be gained from fantasy? But scholars do study films. Therefore, it may be argued that as fantastic as many films were during this era, filmmakers ultimately made choices for film depiction based upon the ability of the audience to identify with something familiar. Film critic and historian Wiley Lee Umphlett observed "...the Hollywood movie can be considered a valid reflector of our popular tastes and values."[4] As such, movies captured a moment in time, and with that moment captured perceptions, trends and perspectives. Movies from a given era become part of the cultural landscape and contain valuable information and documentation, much like magazines, fiction or other elements of popular culture. Film historian and scholar Paul B. Weinstein offered support for analyzing film as part of historical study:

> We are constantly reminded that even a film that only skirts the fringes of historicity can serve as an unmatched illustration, providing insight, posing questions, and inviting further inquiry. Obviously, there are limitations. Films made for commercial release and popular consumption have no obligation to present a true portrait of the past. Facts can be twisted, timelines conflated, endings revised for perceived audience satisfaction. The bottom line in the film business is not accuracy but profit. These shortcomings, however, can actually be turned to advantages when students and instructors utilize film as a gateway....[5]

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[3] Jeanine Basinger, A Woman's View (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1993), 4.
[4] Wiley Lee Umphlett, The Movies Go to College (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), 9.
[5] Paul B. Weinstein, "Movies as the Gateway to History: The History and Film Project," The History Teacher November 2001 http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/35.1/weinstein.html (Retrieved 30 Apr. 2002), paragraphs 1-2.

At least five films were made within an eight-year period during the 1930s, depicting fashion designers and the design function of the American apparel industry. Several of these films were based upon current novels. By examining these works of film and fiction as a body of interpretation, they can convey, perhaps, public perceptions of the fashion industry and of this emerging figure in the world of fashion, the fashion designer. Fashion films lent themselves especially well visually to Hollywood's opulent aesthetic objectives. As Jeanine Basinger pointed out, "Fashion and glamour are a fundamental part of all Hollywood movies."[6] Lavish show rooms, beautiful women and gorgeous clothing were already part of the plot and, as in department store films of the same era, if it was not plausible for a certain character to work in a dressmaking establishment, then they could become a customer.[7]

Each of these selected films depicted the fashion industry with a fashion designer as the central or lead character. Each film included images of the designer, and as a result, a visual definition emerged of how a designer looked and acted. Also some aspects of responsibility and work process were shown. Each film showed the customer or patron of the designer, the selling process and the inspiration or design process. There was also a thread of antagonism toward Paris and its fashion dominance that ran through most of the films. Exclusive of Hollywood designers, California sustained an apparel industry comprising 1,000 companies and designers with estimated revenue of $67,000,000 by 1939.[8] It is important to examine why this substantial market was oddly absent from Hollywood's interpretations of the fashion industry during the 1930s.

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[6] Basinger, 119.
[7] Basinger, 227.
[8] "Los Angeles' Little Cutters," Fortune, May 1945, 134.

How Does a Designer Look and Act? Appearance and Manner Depicted in Film

In Hollywood, fashion design films of the 1930s included portrayals of 14 different designers. Among these various characters, five were women, eight were men and one was a figment, just a name of a person who did not really exist (with a female persona). Of the five female designers, all were depicted as hands-on, creative, hardworking women. All of the eight men were figure heads, front men, or all-out fakes, taking credit or representing designs created by unacknowledged others. Three of the women were American, one was an American expatriate who lived and worked in France most of her life, and one was a Russian princess. Of the men, three were French, one was a Russian prince and four were Americans.

This group of designers were male and female, American, Russian or French and were all ages – some very young and some more mature. Some were employees and some were business owners, or vying for a stake in ownership because in fashion there was money to be made. But all of them were extraordinarily elegant. Inside this elegance there resided two kinds of fashion designers. The first kind was a brilliant, dedicated and hardworking professional of a distinct taste level, a decisive yet thoughtful approach to taking care of their business, employees and associates. They were talented and resourceful. The second kind of designer was flamboyant and *avant guarde* with extreme appearance and mannerisms. The designers of the second type often resorted to theatrics to cover up the fact that they really had no talent, or had to rely on the talent of others, often stealing ideas and designs. Interestingly, gender does enter into the interpretation here. The designers of the hardworking, honest variety were almost always women, with one exception, and the designers of the flamboyant, extreme tone were all men. These two personas largely defined how authors and Hollywood writers interpreted the fashion designer.

According to Gertrude Warburton, two concepts of attractiveness affected perceptions of one's fashionability – *pretty,* which was America's version of attractive, and *chic* which was French.[9] Whereas *pretty* was considered attractive in a graceful or delicate way, *chic* was considered attractive in an elegant, sophisticated way.[10] *Chic* expressed a much more confident presence and implied an empowerment and strength not present in what was considered *pretty*. *Chic* was a cultivated achievement, needing time to acquire and therefore a trait of more maturity while *pretty*, was somewhat inborn, and often associated with youth or inexperience.

Actresses Kay Frances, Bette Davis, Irene Dunne, Helen Westley and Alma Kruger each played dedicated, hardworking, talented designers in their respective films. They were all women. And they were not a "pretty" lot. Each had her own unique and distinct look which helped make them stars and ranks of technicians worked flaws in their favor to serve as trademarks.[11] Kay Frances had a lisp and Bette Davis had almost bird-like features with an aesthetic ranging from the homeliest of women to the most vivacious, confident and alluring.[12] Helen Westley and Alma Kruger were in their fifties when they appeared as designers. Their girlhood beauty had long faded, but strong, interesting looks remained. Helen Westley was described by one reviewer as a "grand dame," Alma Kruger as

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[9] Gertrude Warburton and Jane Maxwell, Fashion for a Living (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1939) 43.
[10] Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd college ed., David B. Guralnik (Cleveland, O.H.: The World Publishing Company, 1979).
[11] Ronald L. Davis, The Glamour Factory: Inside Hollywood's Big Studio System (Dallas, T.X.: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993) 103; Davis discusses the importance that physical perfection was to screen acting and the lengths actors went to in order to enhance their appearance on screen.
[12] Now, Voyager, dir. Irving Rapper, 1hr. 57 min., Warner Brothers, 1942, videocassette. In this film, Bette Davis underwent a remarkable yet convincing metamorphosis from an unrecognizable overweight old maid to a beautiful, confident young woman.

"formidable."[13] Irene Dunne exceeded "pretty," with looks described as classic. With a full range of age and beauty, they were all chic, with a presence that set them apart from other women in the pictures.

This was most evident in stark contrast to the models. Young women were cast throughout the film to model the clothes for the in-film fashion shows or to play roles as models as the story required.[14] While very pretty, they paled compared to the dominant features of the leading ladies. In fact, the models were often uncredited in the films cast list. A yet-to-be-discovered and uncredited Lucille Ball appeared as a blonde model in the final fashion show in Roberta. While the strength of the leading lady was one mark of the mid-century woman's picture genre, it is notable that it was the designer cast as the strong character, not the model or some other person in the ranks of the fashion business. The designing woman had an air of sophistication and polish providing a distinction in comparison to other female counterparts. For example, in Fashions of 1934, Lynn Mason, played by Bette Davis exuded strength and refinement with a cool, deliberate and controlled manner, compared to the lower-class diction and flighty, jealous, manner of Glenda, a make-shift model and the girlfriend of Lynn Mason's unscrupulous boss, Sherman Nash. Even the character's name indicated strength – Lynn *Mason* – bricks, mortar, a brick wall. In Roberta, Irene Dunne's Russian Princess Stephanie was cool, sophisticated and in-charge compared to her male business partner, who admittedly knew nothing about operating a clothing business,

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[13] Yahoo Movies, "Alma Kruger,"<http://movies.yahoo.com/shop?d=hc&id=1800051327&cf=biog&intl=us> (Retrieved 17 August 2004); Yahoo Movies, "Helen Westley," <http://movies.yahoo.com/shop?d=hc&id=1800057393&cf=gen&intl=us> (Retrieved 17 August 2004).

[14] Charlotte Herzog, "'Powder Puff' Promotion: The Fashion Show-in-the-Film," in Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body, ed. Jane Ganes and Charlotte Herzog (New York: Routledge, 1990), 134-159. Herzog documented the presence and use of fashion shows embedded into feature films to help promote reproductions of movie clothes manufactured and marketed through retail outlets across the U.S. Beautiful models and/or actresses who wore the dresses were cast in the film, sometimes uncredited.

but she was also warm and intelligent compared to the calculating, snobbish, social-climbing client Sophia Teal, played by actress Clair Dodd. Alma Kruger's Sophie Miller in Vogues of 1938 charged after models. In one scene, this older formidable woman laid down the law to a juvenile, whining group of models. Sophie Miller threatened "I'm the fairy godmother who's going to work the chemise off of you!" In the frame, she stood out among them not only older but also taller. Helen Westly, who played the named role in Roberta, played a dignified, sincere woman. She had great admiration for honest, good people and little use for phonies. She endured them only for the success of her business.

Kay Frances, Bette Davis and Irene Dunne, three of Hollywood's most alluring leading ladies during the 1930s, were typically cast in roles of intelligent, glamorous, strong women. Kay Frances, who played designer Natalie Upton in Street of Women, was described as being able to "walk through the skuzziest of melodramas as if she were being presented at court....She inhabits the plots as if she were at the Ritz."[15] Her character, Natalie Upton, owned *Madame Natalie Incorporated*, an exclusive custom dress house in New York. Her life contradicted her French moniker. *Madame* is a French salutation for a married woman. Natalie was not French, but a modern American woman who created and sold dresses "of her own design."[16] And, as the mistress of wealthy architect Larry Baldwin, was obviously and intentionally unmarried. Not only did the illusory use of *Madame* by an American designer perhaps indicate a feeling of inferiority or subservience of the American maker toward the French industry, it possibly also served to hint at the constructed romance and allure used to

[15] Basinger, 152.
[16] Street of Women.

sell dresses. The name Upton also provided insight to the character's nature – Upton or "uptown" meaning high class.

While polished and sophisticated in her appearance, she revealed by her energetic speech and sassy air a businesslike confidence in direct contrast to the restrained women of society with whom she associated. Her costume supported this. Upton (Francis) was petite, brunette and clad throughout the film in form-fitting yet modest gowns. For every occasion, whether it be business, social or at home, Upton wore pared down clothing constructed of very clean, modern lines with little embellishment or unnecessary adornment.[17] When Doris, the daughter of Larry Baldwin, learned of her father's affair, she confronted Natalie in her apartment. It was clear to the audience that Doris made no connection between the young, attractive, American Natalie Upton with whom her father had been cheating, and the famous *Madame Natalie*. The plot revealed that Natalie did not come from established wealth or privilege, but built her business, supporting her younger brother. The author described Natalie as "self-supporting and fully independent." The novel goes into some detail about how Natalie started her business:

> In the early stages of their friendship [with Larry Baldwin], long before their affair had actually taken on an intimate aspect, Natalie, hard-put to it to manage to keep her brother in his architectural studies abroad, had allowed Baldwin to finance her in a smart dress-making establishment in Fifty-seventh Street, Manhattan's Rue de la Paix, on a strictly business basis. Her venture, due to her business acumen and extraordinary vision, had been satisfyingly successful....It was characteristic of her that she had not actually become his mistress until after her material debt to him had been repaid.[18]

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[17]Sparse adornment was a specific trait of American design during the 1930s due mostly to the mass production techniques used to turn out American fashion. Embellishment added cost to the garment, both in materials and time and as a result, American designers concentrated more on line, quality of fabric and workmanship, foregoing ornamentation and added embellishment: "The Dressmakers of the U.S.," Fortune, December 1933, 38-39.

[18] Banks, 1, 46.

Bette Davis was described by Time reporter Richard Corliss as "Hollywood's thoroughly modern woman."[19] In Fashions of 1934 Bette Davis played Lynn Mason, an out-of-work sketch artist. Seeking employment in New York's garment district, a very cool, poised Lynn Mason showed her portfolio to less than ethical businessman Sherwood Nash, played by William Powell. Mason replied "sure," determined to make a living as a designer, when Nash asked her if the sketches were really hers. The drop of Mason's chin and lift of the eyes indicated conspiracy. Whether those sketches were original or not, Lynn Mason proved to be an able technician. Mason, Nash and a host of co-conspirators devised a pirating scheme, intercepting original Paris designs on their way from the docks to the stores long enough to photograph them. Mason's job was to produce sketches from the photographs so they appeared to be original designs, select appropriate fabric swatches, create patterns and organize the whole copy process so Nash could sell these "originals" to Seventh Avenue manufacturing houses. "How's my first Lieutenant?" Nash asked Mason. She replied "No complaints, Captain!" The audience saw the young designer going single mindedly about her work, completely in command of the process and all those involved in it, offering expertise no one else had, but was still "first Lieutenant" to Sherman Nash's "Captain." When the pirated gowns were donned for photography by young models, Lynn Mason was thorough in her notice of the design details and specific in her instructions to the photographer on how the gown needed to be photographed for later copying. She had an eye. She knew what would sell exceptionally well.

Once the scheme was uncovered, a new enterprise was developed, in which Lynn Mason moved easily into posing as the wife of a wealthy American industrialist to gain

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[19] Basinger, 25.

entrance to the French showrooms to copy Paris fashions at the source. Lynn Mason was tough, smart and resilient, but also elegant and stylish enough convince French *vendeuse* that she was a well-moneyed socialite. The audience was not given much more information about Lynn Mason's background or education, but the east coast boarding school refinement of Bette Davis brought an air of acquired sophistication and poise necessary for women who strived to succeed in fashion. She seemed much more educated than her streetwise female counterparts. This was also apparent in her clothing, which was very clean-lined, professional and tasteful in comparison to the very frilly, overdone wardrobe of Glenda, a model, or the very excessive dress of the wealthy fashion patrons.

No one was who they appeared to be. Lynn Mason was a sketch artist who then pretended to be a wealthy socialite. Sherman Nash was a con artist with several incarnations, including creative dictator to wealthy women, when it was Lynn who was the behind-the-scenes creator. Snap acted as a chauffer or whatever part he needed to play in Nash's latest scheme. Baroque, a great French originator, lifted his designs from old costume history books. His wife, the Grand Duchess Alix, was not really a Grand Duchess at all, but was Nash's old friend Mabel McGuire from America. In Fashions of 1934, the fashion had the appearance of being a very sordid and shiftless business, the designers and their associates crooks.

Irene Dunne, trained as an opera vocalist, transferred her acquired polish and poise as a trademark element to her screen persona. After a failed audition at the Met in New York, she turned her talent to Broadway musical comedy and later to Hollywood. As Princess Stephanie in Roberta, Dunne portrayed a penniless Russian princess who, needing to earn a living, translated her breeding and sophistication to dress design for the House of Roberta.

Described as once very beautiful, the aged Roberta, played by Helen Westley, was an American who left her home in Ohio decades earlier and went on to live an extraordinary, exciting life in Europe, but by Ohio standards, scandalous! The novel provided expanded detail about Roberta's past. Her name was Minnie Roberts. She never married, but spent her life with numerous men, the last of whom was a French nobleman, a marquis. As his companion, she became known as a famous beauty. He left his wealth to his family and left the young Minnie penniless. When War came to France, Minnie volunteered and donated the little money she had saved. Once the war ended, she opened her own dressmaking shop and called herself "Roberta." Alice Duer Miller described in the novel, "After the war many French ladies went to her, out of gratitude, and stayed from choice. Americans and South Americans soon followed. She was successful."[20]

With Roberta's reputation and contacts and Stephanie's breeding and royal pedigree, together they built the House of Roberta. Neither of these women was formally trained in dress design, but used their beauty, titles and positions in society to dictate proper style to other women of wealth and position. There was some indication in the film that there were various employees carrying out the details of the business. There was an orderly little man named Albert, with a tape measure around his neck who kept appearing with fabric and gowns, awaiting instructions. In the novel, however, the entire operation and staff leadership was described. With this, the reader was told about how the showrooms and models were organized for two major openings in February and August and two smaller shows at midseason. Financing was explained in some detail.[21]

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[20] Miller, 21.
[21] Miller, 87.

John Kent, an estranged nephew of Roberta's, contacted her during a trip to Paris. He had been callously jilted by his Ohio fiancée, Sophia Teal, just before sailing. Sophie thought of him as "...just a dull, small-town, oversized young man...."[22] Feeling rather lost in "The City of Love" without a lover John confided in Roberta. Roberta helped Kent polish up his "big jock" ways and acquire more of a worldly air. He hoped his new image would help win Sophia back.

Roberta was ailing, her health failing badly. She passed away and, according to French law, without a will, possessions went to the nearest relative. John Kent inadvertently inherited his Aunt Roberta's dressmaking business. Stephanie was irate, expecting that the business would be left to her upon Roberta's death. Kent agreed. He admittedly did not know the first thing about running a fashion house and obligingly offered the business to Stephanie. Her pride would not allow it, but she did agree to a partnership and an option to buy his half when she was able. Stephanie was a princess and, diminished fortune or not, strove to maintain her dignity. She would not allow her family name to be disgraced by taking charity. She was very proud of how she was able to overcome her hardships and provide for her cousin, Ladislaw, also a prince, who worked as the doorman at Roberta's.

Stephanie managed all aspects of the business, even before Roberta's death, and was recognized by reputation as a force behind the name of Roberta. "It isn't generally known that Madame has been letting me do the designing," Stephanie explained to John Kent upon her friend's death. After Roberta's death, it was only with Stephanie's help that John Kent was able to maintain the success of the business, but it was the peculiarity of an American man running a French dressmaking house, and a handsome man at that, which brought

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[22] Miller, 11.

curious women into the shop. Roberta's reputation, however, survived. On the invitations of the first opening after Roberta's death, the copy still read "Roberta invites you to her...."

Stephanie, who worked hard and contributed real talent to the operation, was both pleased and resentful of the new interest in The House of Roberta because of John Kent and his reputation as a tall, handsome American football player. He admittedly had no knowledge of women's clothing or business management, and contributed very little except through his curious presence.

In Vogues of 1938, Alma Kruger played Sophie Miller. The plot revealed that she started working for the House of Curson as a seamstress and worked her way up over decades as the Vice President of the house. George Curson, played by Warner Baxter, inherited House of Curson, a business which was founded by his grandfather. While George Curson owned the company and was a compassionate, innovative and responsible businessman, he never touched a bolt of fabric and relied on Sophie's genius, attention to detail and dedication to develop the line. However the house bore his name and he was recognized as the creative force by the clients. Curson actual role was a leader, manager, and problem-solver. As the head of the house, he served as more of an editor to the line, instead of actually sketching or draping. For example, in one scene Curson advised Sophie during a stressful moment. A detail-oriented perfectionist, Sophie agonized over a poor line in a garment, concerned that it would throw off the entire collection. Curson reassured her of the gowns beauty and that he saw no such flaw. Curson learned his business also through experience, inheriting the firm from his family. I include him among ranks of designers which Hollywood depicted as responsible, talented and caring. But physically, Curson was

similar to Hollywood's depiction of a male designer in his dress and role as a fashion expert to women.

Sophie's longevity with the company implied that her education was through experience rather than through more formal methods. She worked her way up from a seamstress in the firm. She did not sketch or work in an office, but was always present in a workroom, fitting gowns onto clients or models, or seen coordinating armies of models for the showroom. Her costume was elegant, always dressed in a gown. She worked hard, always taking care of the details. One example of her dedication was shown when Curson, in an attempt to make his wife happy, agreed to back a play for her to star in. Knowing his wife had no talent, he operated against his better judgment, and the play soon folded. To fund the play, Curson used the equity in his firm. Sophie tried desperately to keep the business going in the face of financial ruin.

Unconditionally dedicated, and proud of her achievements through her career, Sophie exhausted herself and ultimately died of a heart attack from the stress. She always carried a thimble with her for luck and as a reminder of her humble beginnings. When she died, Curson adopted the thimble as his personal talisman, hoping for her continued inspiration to be with him as he tried to save his business.

Each of these women designers were the strength behind men, personally and professionally. In Street of Women, Natalie used her vision to help Larry Baldwin achieve success beyond his own imagination. In Fashions of 1934, Lynn Mason was the creative and organizational talent behind all of Sherman Nash's schemes. In Roberta, both women provided stability. Roberta gave confidence and a social education to her nephew. After Roberta's death Princess Stephanie provided the talent and ingenuity that kept the House of

Roberta running and ultimately made it thrive. In Vogues of 1938, Sophie gave her life to generations of male Cursons who owned and operated House of Curson, providing talent, maturity and stability.

The second group of designers depicted in Hollywood films was all male and more or less a group of peacocks, strutting about with all sorts of attitude and color. Ann Klein once remarked on the prevailing image of male designers wearing cravats and tails and working in "sumptuous, crystal chandeliered salons..."[23] She may well have been referring to Hollywood's interpretation. This was primarily the visual aesthetic presented to audiences of men who designed and sold women's clothing. Male designers were mostly presented in cravats, tails, spats, slick hair and pencil thin mustaches, an aesthetic of aristocracy. They were depicted as public relations men to wealthy clients, with more of a social presence than a business presence.

Valerie Steele discussed the roots of the stereotypical male fashion designer in Women of Fashion. She dated the genesis of this stereotype to the late nineteenth century, referencing sources that indicated "the existence of a sublimely sexual relationship between male couturiers and their female clients."[24] Polished and aristocratic, these men exuded a charm over their patrons. This raises interesting questions about the differences in how male and female designers *promoted* their designs to female clients. Steele asserted that "there are no clear female tracks marching through fashion history, nor can we automatically identify any given dress as designed by a woman [versus a man]."[25] Historically, the image of the meticulous, polished, artistic male was a stark contrast to the subordinate role of the typical

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[23] Valerie Steele, Women of Fashion: Twentieth Century Designers (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 122.
[24] Steele, 24.
[25] Steele, 15.

female dressmaker. In other words, wealthy, aristocratic women would more readily "take orders" from a man, an aristocrat of social standing, than a woman who worked in a trade.[26] This was precisely the interpretation projected by Hollywood about the male fashion designer.

In a few instances, however, there were subtle hints that men who designed women's clothes were somehow less masculine than men who performed more traditionally male occupations. The polish and fastidiousness was more effeminate than aristocratic. This was most pronounced in the film version of Roberta. Huck, John Kent's musical side kick played by Fred Astaire, learned that his football coach friend had just inherited a dressmaking business chided his him about a "tape measure around the neck and a pin cushion on the hip." When Kent left Paris after an argument with Sophia and Stephanie, Huck was left in charge, running the business in John Kent's absence. Huck begged John Kent on the phone "someone has to come and take this ridiculous business off my shoulders. In the four days I've been here my voice is beginning to change!"

The male designer's name, even though he did not provide talent or real creative direction, went on the label because he engaged in the financial risk and ultimate responsibility necessary to operate the business. He hired the technicians, usually women, to provide the essential skill to produce the garments. This clearly coincided with the role of the designer portrayed in career literature regarding the business strategy of the retail designer. Interestingly, while this may have been the popular business persona of actual male designers, Hollywood mocked the designing male with an interpretation which smacked of something less than ethical.

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[26] Steele, 24,

Sherwood Nash in Fashions of 1934 was a con man, and his name supported this. Where his counterpart, Lynn Mason, had a name denoting strength, the name Sherwood directly related to 'bandit' or 'criminal,' referring to Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood with his band of merry thieves who stole from the rich. But the only "poor" who received the money was Sherwood Nash! Sherwood Nash operated four schemes during the course of the story, all focused on separating wealthy people from their money. The first was the business of pirating Paris fashions long enough to create copies before sending them onto the stores. New York retailer/designer, Duryea, was outraged. In a press montage, a newspaper headline read "Stamp out copying evil which is undermining our business. Fashion designers unite to stamp out copying evil. 'Dress industry menaced by pirates' says Duryea."[27]

Once exposed, Nash approached each of these "united" designers individually and offered them an 'exclusive' contract, sending him to Paris to lift designs at the source, then send sketches back to the designers. Each of the four designers entered what they thought was an exclusive deal with Nash. Once in Paris, however, it was not as easy to get into the showrooms as Nash had planned. He and Lynn Mason, posing as husband and wife, were shown fabulous gowns in the showroom of the renowned Oscar Baroque, and Nash's side kick, Snap, shot pictures with a secret camera hidden in his walking stick. The name Baroque also provided telling symbolism; *baroque* was an art and architecture period in the 17th and mid-18th centuries most noted for being "complex, gaudy, verging on excessive."[28] Their actions were discovered, film confiscated and they were blacklisted throughout Paris.

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[27] Fashions of 1934, this was a close-up of a newspaper headline in the film.
[28] Dictionary.com

Consoling themselves at Ritz Bar in Paris, Lynn Mason and Sherman Nash made the acquaintance of an ostrich rancher and salesman, Joe Ward, played by Hugh Herbert. Over several drinks, they concocted a ridiculous scheme to make ostrich feathers the rage. With Lynn Mason as the creator, Nash partnered with his previous nemesis, Oscar Baroque, to promote fashions made of ostrich feathers. Nash's theory – anything promoted as fashionable by a French designer would be accepted by women who buy fashion. The fashion show was a full scale musical extravaganza designed and choreographed by Busby Berkley with hundreds of chorus girl/models. Nash underhandedly took over Baroque's business, renamed it *Maison Elegance*, and moved easily into yet his fourth scheme as an American *couturier* in Paris. Nash manipulated, blackmailed, charmed and fast-talked established fashion businessmen and the wealthy patrons. He stole and copied. He was a mastermind, just like his literary counterpart Robin Hood, exploiting the talents and resources of many people.

Several of the male designers depicted in the 1930s represented equally questionable businessmen. In Vogues of 1938, Prince Muratov, of Russian nobility, attempted to parlay his royal title into a business. With minimal talent, he had difficulty attracting backers on his own merit so he persuaded his wife, a former model at the rival House of Curson, to steal Curson's latest designs and provide him with a list of clients. In Irene, Ray Milland played Don Marshall, a young heir, who bought Madam Lucy's, only to learn that there was no such person as Madame Lucy. The company was operated by an arrogant, unscrupulous man named Monsieur Dumand who used his position to impose himself on wishful young women hoping to become models. When clients inquired about Madame Lucy, Dumand pompously expressed that she was creating and was not to be disturbed; this added to the mystique of

Madame Lucy. Don Marshall knew nothing about fashion, but had money to invest and decided to use it to get control of the company for his own personal reasons. He was smitten with a young woman, Irene O'Dare, and wanted the company so he could give her a job as a model. Irene O'Dare and Don Marshall met when O'Dare was sent to Marshall's aunt's house to get upholstery measurements for the furniture. Marshall was immediately taken with her beauty, spunk and wit and told her about Madame Lucy's, which he had just learned of from his friend. Flattered that she was thought beautiful enough to model, Irene went to apply for a job and was accosted by the manager Dumand. During a chance meeting with Don Marshall several days later, she told him what happened. Out of guilt for sending this young woman into such a situation, he went to Madame Lucy's to confront the manager. Marshall was so irritated by the manager's condescension that he bought the company so he could have the satisfaction of firing the pompous manager and give Irene a job. It was at this point that Marshall and the audience learned that Madame Lucy was a figment, a front, and that there was no such creator. Marshall hired Irene as a model, keeping up the Madame Lucy front. Don Marshall along with his friend Bob Vincent, played by actor Alan Marshal, and new business manager, Mr. Smith, played by actor Roland Young comprised the persona of Madame Lucy.[29] Whether an intended message or not, throughout the story it took three men to accomplish the work of one woman.

How Does a Designer Work? Design Work Process Depicted in Film

To be a designer, one must sketch, at least in terms of Hollywood's visual lexicon of the work of fashion designers. This is a curious interpretation, as the career literature of the

[29] Actor Roland Young played the manager of Madame Lucy's. He also played would-be beau and creative confident to Kay Francis' Natalie Upton in Street of Women. He is the actor reviewing the sketch in the Street of Women photograph on page 105, Figure 2.

era established that designers utilized a variety of work processes, including sketching, draping, cutting and pinning, or a combination, to develop garments. Some career literature indicated that cutting, pinning and sewing was the old way, and sketching the modern way.[30] Sketching has also been positioned as a gendered skill in design, asserting that men prefer to sketch while women prefer to drape, owing to the idea that men (largely) view clothing as art, while women consider the practical aspects, being able to take the woman's body more into consideration by creation through draping.[31] According to Mary Donahue, sketching denoted a more industrial and modern application of art and creativity toward fashion – a movement away from the idea of handicrafts.[32] In terms of Hollywood's portrayal of

Figure 18: Bette Davis and William Powell review sketches in Fashions of 1934. Provided courtesy of Warner Brothers Entertainment, Inc.

Figure 19: Roland Young and Kay Francis review sketches in Street of Women. Provided courtesy of Warner Brothers Entertainment. Inc.

[30] Refer to Chapter 5 of this research for design process depicted in career literature.
[31] Steele, 114-115.
[32] Mary Donahue, "Design and the Industrial Arts in America, 1894-1940: An Inquiry into Fashion Design and Art and Industry" (Ph. D. diss., The City University of New York, 2001), 47-48.

designers, only the female designers produced sketches and it was only by sketching that ideas were presented. If sketches resulted from some other preliminary process, such as draping and pinning, this was absent from the plot. Men looked at sketches, referred to them, but did not generate them or show them.

In 1930s Hollywood films, the sketch was the key point of departure for the creative function of the designer. A scene might include the designer sketching or showing an illustration, with the next scene showing the finished gown. A publicity still of Street of Women (included as a promotional still in the novel) showed designer Natalie Upton seated at a drafting table working on a new design.[33] In Roberta however, the focus was on the finished garments, treating the feature film as an extended fashion show, with some reference to sketches and very little attention to any other aspect of the process.[34] Lynn Mason's ability to sketch defined her role as a designer in Fashions of 1934. She landed her job with Nash by showing sketches – no indication of any other technical ability or experience. In Vogues of 1938, Prince Muratov pirated Curson's ideas, and then presented the sketches to the backers as collateral and assurance.

In Irene, sketches were everywhere, propped up all along the walls and furniture in the salon office. But in the absence of a real Madame Lucy, it was unclear exactly who was generating the work. The owner, Don Marshall, had no knowledge of clothing and the business manager was solely interested in sales and which models sold the most. There was no creative activity happening. Sketches were omnipresent, providing a fashionable backdrop; otherwise, the office could have serviced any sort of business. In the precise

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[33] Banks, center spread inset.
[34] Herzog, 135.

timing of the Hollywood film, the actual sketch often rated a close up and several seconds of exposure to the audience. Hollywood included very little visual or spoken information on what happened in between concept and completion. Perhaps that part of the process was not visually interesting, or too technical. Or perhaps too slow a process to accommodate the speed necessary for Hollywood story pacing.

In Hollywood portrayals, the pressure was on the designers to produce the big fashion show with only one week to go and nothing ready. For example, in Roberta, both Kent and Princess Stephanie stayed away from the business, angry at each other and thinking the other was preparing for the show. Near the end of the film, there was only one week left until the show with Huck and Countess Schwaranka feebly advising the haughty tailor, Albert, about fabric and color choice, when Princess Stephanie unexpectedly returned. She learned that Kent was, in fact, not running things and, dedication kicking in, she reviewed the pathetic sketches which Huck and Tanka were working with for the upcoming show. Taking charge, she agreed to design the garments if Huck and Tanka planned the show.

Twenty new gowns were produced for this final show, extravagantly constructed of fur, satin, velvets, chiffons and silhouettes requiring significant architectural foundations. The timeline presented would have the audience believe that the process of designing, sourcing, cutting, construction, fitting and incorporation into a rehearsed show occurred inside of one week. Unrealistically compressed, the work process timeline possibly presented the idea that creating beautiful women's clothing was easy and fast work. The nature of a movie is to race against time, to create excitement through devices like setting deadlines then making the characters meet them before the film ends. Richard Maltby, film scholar and educator, referred to this as "movie time." Moviegoers knew that the story would resolve

itself in time for them to go home and accepted some compression of the temporal arrangement of plot elements in order for this to happen.[35] One week to prepare a show was a temporal maneuver to create a climactic point of excitement around the final fashion show scenes. While Maltby claimed that moviegoers accepted this compression for the plot to resolve itself, with rapid changes in fashion from season to season, and the multitude of clothing available for sale in shops and department stores, this particular film treatment could possibly have left viewers with an unreal idea of how lines were planned and the labor that went into producing even the samples. In fact, during this same era, professional organizations such as The Fashion Group launched promotional campaigns to educate the consumer on the size and scope of the apparel industry, providing detailed information about design development and the magnitude of the American industry.[36]

Roberta was not the only film that used the strategy of the last minute push to build more excitement around the final fashion scenes. In Vogues of 1938, after Sophie's death George Curson found himself financially ruined from backing his wife's flop Broadway show. It was just days before he was to launch the season's line and he could not get backing to put the show together. In a last-minute stroke of genius (as he rubbed Sophie's thimble) it occurred to him that he could use the scenery and music he owned from the defunct Broadway show to present his own "original models."

A similar device was used in Irene. The gown Irene was to model at an upcoming function showcasing the designs of Madame Lucy was delivered to her apartment. Showing off for her family and neighbors, she allowed her friend to try on the dress. Through a

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[35] Richard Maltby, Hollywood: An Introduction, (Cambridge, M.A.: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 296.
[36] This promotional campaign is examined in detail in Chapter Six of this study.

mishap with a kettle of boiling stew, the gown was completely destroyed, leaving Irene with little time to replace it. For fear of losing her job, she did not contact her employer about the accident. Instead, Irene arrived at the function wearing a blue gown which once belonged to her mother, who wore it as a costume in a vaudeville act years earlier. Irene confidently passed through the crowd, promoting this old costume as a Madame Lucy original. The neckline, bustle and general silhouette of the gown were clearly out of sync with the other gowns modeled, but in the context of showing original models, this gown was readily accepted by the socialite patrons as a new, fresh look and it became the rage.

Even though the actual function of creative design work was not present in film, there was a discussion and portrayal of historic dress as a key source of inspiration. In Irene, the audience witnessed an obviously older style being taken as fresh and new. This could indicate how history provided inspiration but a point of trivia is telling. Irene was originally a play produced in 1919 and ran on Broadway for several years. In a 1919 production, a blue satin bustled dress was an old dress, miserably out of style, and served as a gag to the audience about how gullible rich women could be about fashion. But by 1940, this look was actually, once again, considered charming, feminine and demure, and instead of mocking the wealthy, illustrated how historic dress provided design inspiration. Fashions of 1934 discussed history as inspiration in a much more straightforward manner, which came across almost as a primer or tutorial to the audience (consumer) on how fashion was created:

> NASH (to Lynn Mason): Does that look familiar to you? *As they walk through a street side book bazaar after being thrown out of the House of Baroque for trying to steal designs.*
> LYNN: It's exactly like one of those models we saw at Baroque's!
> BOOK DEALER (with French accent): The fashion, he is like, how you say, a cycle. What is passing now will be fashion in maybe fifty years, maybe a hundred.

LYNN: Baroque gets all of his ideas from books like these.[37]

At the end of the film, during the final show, the models were displayed, crediting the old art masters which inspired them. The audience saw a large screen with a famous painting, and then the screen lifted to expose a model wearing the inspired garment.[38]

More fantastic versions of "inspiration" were depicted by Hollywood. In one humorous scene in Vogues of 1938, Prince Muratov consulted with a client. He entered the room with an entourage in tow, and before a statue of Beethoven, played a concerto to conjure the spirit of the great master to help inspire him to create a gown of "moonlight" for his patron. Muratov was being commissioned to create a costume for a prestigious charity costume ball and his client had asked for "something Egyptian." Her request was cut short and she was quieted by Muratov so he could receive the inspiration coming to him from spiritual sources. It was later revealed that Muratov's theatrics were intended to cover up the fact that he had no talent and ultimately resorted to stealing designs from Curson to supply his patrons.

Design positions often appeared to function as more managerial than creative and the compensation was depicted as tremendous. In Gowns by Roberta, Stephanie chided John Kent for dismissing dressmaking as a profession and wanting to go back home to coach football:

> "But Stephanie, I must go home. I have my work there."
> "Your work there? Will it bring you half a million francs a year?"
> "You don't mean that we should make anything like that in dressmaking?"
> "A great deal more than that – if we are clever."
> He sank back staring. He could hardly believe it…this was wealth."[39]

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[37] Fashions of 1934.
[38] Fashions of 1934.
[39] Miller, 86.

The French franc fluctuated in value against the American dollar after World War I, peaking at 35.84 per American dollar in 1926. One historic source indicated that the franc leveled out to about 25.00 per American dollar after the stock crash of 1929 and remained at that level through mid 1930.[40] Using this figure as a conversion rate, 500,000 francs was approximately equal to $20,000 American dollars in 1933. This figure is consistent with the uppermost salary level reported in 1930s career literature by top American designers throughout the 1930s. And "wealth" it was. From 1929 to 1932 the average income of an American plummeted by 40% from $2,300 to $1,500, with a reported average income during the 1930s of $1,368.[41] Provided this was an accurate reporting of top industry salary, a successful fashion designer's income was almost 15 times greater than average earnings for that period.

Gowns by Roberta was the only work of fiction or film that discussed specific income. However, other stories and films alluded to excessive wealth, mainly through the settings designers worked and lived in. Apartments were lavish. In Street of Women, Natalie lived in a penthouse apartment featuring panoramic views of the Manhattan skyline and very modern Art Deco interior design. Roberta also featured elegant, very modern Art Deco décor. Vogues of 1938 and Irene depicted sweeping stairways, crystal chandeliers and plush upholsteries and carpets. Nearly every film showed domestic help assisting the designer in the operation of their personal business and household. Street of Women and Roberta included ladies maids, and Arthur Treacher played the ubiquitous butler in both Irene and Vogues of 1938.

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[40] W. Bailey, Americans in Paris, 1900-1930: A Selected, Annotated Bibliography, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989) appendix.

[41] "1930-1939," Kingwood College Library Online/American Cultural History: The Twentieth Century, <http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decade 30.html > (Retrieved 19 October 2004).

Designers were mostly depicted performing a number of other duties that had nothing to do with creation, but were mostly managerial, organizational and promotional duties. In Street of Women, Natalie Upton was seen seated at a desk in an office performing administrative duties, writing correspondence and was called to the showroom to meet with a customer. She was also heard listing off a number of publications for which sketches had been prepared and were ready for delivery. In Fashions of 1934, Sherwood Nash cajoled customers and negotiated business deals. In Roberta, the most interesting plot developments centered on dealing with troublesome customers. In fact, a main theme of contention was John Kent's ability to handle difficult, wealthy women and how this suited him well, in Roberta's eyes, as a likely heir of her business. And while Sophie Miller in Vogues of 1938 provided all the talent and technical expertise, George Curson worked with investors, hired and fired models and pampered wealthy clients.

The Customer and the Selling Process: Piracy, Propaganda, Class and Gender

Dealing with the wealthy and spoiled customer was a common theme which ran through the work of the 1930s designer in Hollywood films. Hollywood loved poking fun at rich women who paid excessive prices and endured ridiculous rituals to have the latest fashion. Customers were consistently depicted as vain, unattractive, aged and often overweight women with more money than good sense. Snobbery and elitism were mocked. Vanity was punished with humiliation. The consistent presence of this theme entreats consideration.

In "Female Audiences of the 1920s and Early 1930s" author Melvin Stokes discussed research on female spectatorship. Stokes divided studies into two categories; those which

analyzed women as consumers through merchandise 'tie-ups' or constructed images of women through women's pictures, and those that endeavored to gauge women's responses to films by extracting ethnographies from women's memories of film. Stokes indicated that while the latter method had a better chance of helping gain an understanding of how women might have experienced cinema and been impacted by it, it had generated significantly fewer studies. This was primarily because the ethnographies were retrieved historically, long after the initial experience and women were answering primarily from memories. The more reliable sources were generated from the early 1940s on so, out of convenience, that is the era most of the studies of this sort center upon.

Other factors supported the fact that audiences of the 1920s and 1930s were largely women. Informal audience surveys published in a number of movie fan magazines during the late 1920s and early 1930s, indicated that 60 to 83 percent of the film audience was female. Female stars far exceeded the number of male stars, and the stories were written largely by female screen writers generated from popular fiction written by women authors for women audiences. 'Women's pictures' comprised about 25 percent of the industry's Top Ten for the first half of the 1930s. Marketing and exhibition also largely targeted a female audience, with the popularity of the matinee. Fan magazines appealed to women's interests and theater interior design utilized plush carpeting, soft lighting and opulent details to cater to the female patron. [42]

Evidence exists that, not only was the audience women, but it was predominantly composed of working-class women. In Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure, author and

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[42] Melvyn Stokes, "Female Audiences of the 1920s and Early 1930s," in Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies ed. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 42-44.

historian Nan Enstad examined working-women and their relationship with movies. She reported:

> They built particular and distinctive social practices around motion picture consumption and incorporated movies into their established consumer practices around dime novels and fashion, weaving motion pictures into their identities as ladies.[43]

She credited at least part of the popularity to social respectability, as going to the movies was considered more appropriate amusement for young, un-chaperoned women than dance halls or amusement parks.[44]

In Working Class Hollywood, author Steven J. Ross also supported that the early audiences and the roots of movie going were largely composed of working-class people:

> Movies and the working class were intertwined in three important ways: working people were the industry's main audience; they were the frequent subjects of films; and they were the moviemakers – both as employees who labored in studio lots and as independent producers who turned out their own pictures. Often referred to as 'the poor man's amusement,' movie theaters took root in blue-collar and immigrant neighborhoods and slowly spread outward into middle-class areas and small towns throughout the nation.[45]

Not only did working-class women gravitate to motion pictures, but the upper class appeared to have shied away, because "...high-income women regarded Hollywood as cheap in an overdressed, befeathered way."[46] Simply, themes about the common or poor prevailing over the rich were popular with working-class women most likely because it felt good to see their betters shown up, and see the ordinary person rise above their current status, especially during the 1930s Depression era, when the chasm between the haves and have-nots widened.

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[43] Nan Enstad, Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 161-162.
[44] Enstad, 162.
[45] Steven J. Ross, Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of America, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 6-7.
[46] Amy Porter, "Sun-Suit Strip," Collier's 18 January 1947, 73.

In a very funny scene, early in Fashions of 1934 a wealthy woman shopped in a posh showroom, being charmed by the proprietor of the salon to purchase a particular "Paris original" for $375. She remarked how "steep" the price was, but was persuaded because it was a true original. In the next scene the dowager primped in her new frock, getting ready to interview a young woman sent over by an agency to apply for a job as a maid in her home. The young woman entered the lady's boudoir wearing what appeared to be the exact same dress purchased at Rosenblatt's Basement for $16.95. The wealthy woman was irate, in the next scene calling the proprietor of the shop who sold her the "exclusive" garment.

Nash's scheme to create a rage for ostrich feathers into high fashion also mocked the wealthy. He blackmailed *couturier* Baroque into promoting a show of feathered garments, creating a demand among wealthy women through a huge fashion show musical and dancing extravaganza. And once Nash opened *Maison Elegance,* the audience saw him prancing through the salon, offering grand advice and flattery to the female customers, selling himself as a creative visionary and watched the wealthy women unquestioningly following his direction and giggling like school girls at his flattery and attention.

In Roberta, the audience was introduced to Princess Stephanie and Countess Tanka Schwarenka (Ginger Rogers) over a hostile encounter between the women. During a fitting, the Countess, who was actually American singer Lizzie Getz posing as titled royalty to meet wealthy men in Europe, acted appalled by the gown, the fit and the price tag. She threw a tantrum, which required Roberta, Stephanie and John Kent to calm her down. This scene was revealing. Roberta's demeanor indicated that this sort of behavior was common among her wealthy clientele. The Countess, who was not really royalty or born to privilege, behaved badly toward Stephanie because she felt it was expected of a woman of social status

to do so and was acting a part to be convincing. When Kent asked her why she carried on this way, she responded "Monsieur, you do not understand. These Latin races, they must be shouted at." The line was lost a bit due to the fact that nothing about Irene Dunn, who played Stephanie, appeared Latin. Her English was flawless, without even so much as an attempt at a fake accent of any sort and her complexion and hair were light. But the remark did play to the class issues at work between customers and their dressmakers. Even though dressmakers were at the top of the working-class woman's hierarchy, in the eyes of the ladies who hired them, they were still working-class.[47] And an issue of gender was also exposed. Schwarenka yelled, screamed and stomped her feet at Stephanie, but instantly calmed down for the tall, handsome John Kent. Schwarenka was actually impressed when the much larger, stronger John Kent pushed her, sending her flying across the room onto the couch. This, again, is an example of Steele's observation that women of society/aristocratic women more readily took orders from men than from other women, even in terms of fashion.[48]

This same theme was portrayed by the snobbish American social climber and ex-girlfriend of John Kent, Sophia Teal, who wore inappropriate clothing just because men flattered her to do so. Her coldness and outward snobbishness made her an immediate villainess, who Huck and Princess Stephanie dealt with cunningly. Stephanie disliked Sophia for how badly she had treated John during their previous courtship. Stephanie coaxed Sophia to purchase a dress she knew John Kent disliked in order to cast ill favor toward Sophie from John. She accomplished this by telling Sophia how the dress made her "elegantly sensuous." At first Stephanie held the gown back, as Kent had asked it be removed from the line for its

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[47] Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1882), 128-135.
[48] Steele, 24.

bad taste. When an assistant brought it into the fitting room accidentally, Stephanie quickly made up a story that it was being saved for another customer. Vainly, Sophia took Stephanie's actions as jealousy. Put off by this woman's attitude, Stephanie played to Sophia's vanity. When Huck enthusiastically joined in with his positive comments about the dress, Sophia was sold.

The novel Gowns by Roberta, Alice Duer Miller demonstrated in this scene a good designer's ultimate power over a client's appearance:

> "I will try and make him see her as she really is. All my life I have been dressing women to bring out the best in them, now let me see what I can do to bring out the worst – there's a lot of the worst there....I looked at those green shadows in her complexion, and at those bones – I knew what that dress would do. Elegantly sensuous – what a goose of a woman."[49]

In Vogues of 1938, designer George Curson faced a client relations dilemma as well. A beautiful young socialite, Wendy Van Clattering, played by Joan Bennett, commissioned his firm to design her wedding gown. She was to be married in a very high-profile society wedding to a man she did not love in order to save her family's social position. She begged Curson to help her by not delivering the gown on time, causing the wedding to be delayed or postponed. Curson refused, citing his company's reputation. He was never late with a client's order, and why would he want to do this in such high-profile situation? When the gown was delivered on time Miss Van Clattering had to run out on her wedding and went to Curson's salon in refuge from the hounding press. Being rather spoiled and used to getting what she wanted, she blamed Curson for her situation because he would not publicly efface himself on her behalf. Capitalizing on the immense media attention directed at her, Curson hired her as a model, utilizing her beauty, social position and tenacity for his own advantage.

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[49] Miller, 168-169.

Curson faced numerous challenges with demanding clientele, and this theme was foreshadowed through a conversation with one of his models early in the film. He overheard a model rebuke Sophie Miller during a fitting and stepped in:

> CURSON: You shouldn't talk that way to Mrs. Miller.
> MODEL: Mr. Curson, I'm tired. That woman's been pawing me all morning.
> CURSON: 'That woman' as you so quaintly call her happens to be the Vice President of the House of Curson.
> MODEL: Well, so what! She still carries on like the seamstress she used to be.
> CURSON: Well now, I may have to cater to snobs, but I don't have to employ them. When do you want to quit?

He did cater to snobs. In fact, the clientele was depicted across the board as a group of pretentious elitists who required an incredible amount of maintenance in order to be satisfied by the designer. One hilarious scene illustrated the cajoling and maneuvering on the part of the designer to satisfy the finicky patrons, while at the same time allowing the audience to enjoy their behavior as foolish and unwarranted. In this scene, Curson was called into a private consultation with a very unhappy client:

> MRS. VANDER GRIFFITHS: You don't know how to make hats that are becoming. Your grandfather did. You do not.
> CURSON: I have just the hat for you, especially designed! *Curson left the dressing room and entered the cleaning ladies locker room, surveying each of their hats.* May, what did you pay for that hat?
> MAY: $1.25 *Curson offered her $5.00, which May gladly accepted, fussed with the hat a bit and, as an afterthought, added a feather plucked from a flower arrangement in the hallway. He returned to the dressing room with his new creation.*
> MRS. VANDER GRIFFITHS: That's what I want!
> CURSON: *Pleased with himself* That's what I thought!

The simple brown felt hat worn by May, the cleaning woman, mocked Mrs. Vander Griffith's pettiness and vanity. Mrs. Vander Griffiths was being attended to by an assistant, not Curson himself. This customer had been coming to Curson's since the grandfather ran the business. When she was not being attended to by the owner, she threw what amounted to

a puerile tantrum. To cajole his client, Curson made the grand gesture of creating something just for her, much like an adult does to make a spoiled child feel like he or she is getting special treatment. The fact that the creation was a work woman's hat and a feather from the hallway flower arrangement emphasized even more how childish and self-centered wealthy clients often behaved. There is a point to be made that this gag served to undermine the complexity and artistry of the design process. However, since the ultimate target market of the 1930s film industry was the working-class woman, the intention was clearly to belittle the spoiled and audaciously wealthy.

This was not the only client Curson put in her place. When he learned that his client list had been stolen and designs had been pirated by Prince Muratov, Curson and Wendy went to work to expose the fraudulence and disloyalty. Once Muratov stole Curson's designs, he contacted Curson clients and offered them Prince Muratov "Originals" at undercut prices. Once Curson learned which clients purchased which designs, he made exact copies for his model, Wendy Van Clattering – much more beautiful and much more alluring than his dowager patrons, and sent her out to the same events wearing the same garments. Wendy appeared at the horse races, the opera and to a night club as the cigarette girl, each time wearing the exact same dress as a 'Prince Muratov Original' client. The score was finally settled at an annual charity costume event at which a Curson design won every year, but no one commissioned his House this year. His clients all went to Prince Muratov. So Curson designed a very unique, modern gown for Wendy to wear on behalf of The House of Curson. The gown was more modern in design, composed of clean, long, body-conscious lines and monochromatic color, which contrasted starkly to the ornate, beaded, colorful garments of the other woman. Amid the sea of decked out women vying for the prize, the

attention focused on one patron in particular, who boasted her gown "cost $10,000 but it's worth it because it is an original Muratov." Her manner was most pretentious and vain, and she sported an extremely overdone appearance, the dress emphasizing her overweight, unfit figure. Wendy wished to see this woman put in her place and managed to pull a loose thread and watch the gown dismantle in front of the judges and all the other guests, beads flying everywhere. With the wrath of angry society women aimed at him, Prince Muratov was soon out of business.

Curson was depicted as a kind and brilliant businessperson, consistently outsmarting his villainous, vain and pompous opposition. A court order prohibited Wendy from appearing at House of Curson's as a model so he invited her as a "guest" to his shows, of course wearing his designs. Curson cunningly outmaneuvered Muratov's plans to put him out of business by stealing designs and clients. And, without any financial backing, he brilliantly reutilized scenery and lighting from his defunct Broadway musical to showcase his collection. In fact, Curson impressed his adversaries so much with his resourcefulness that one of them, Prince Muratov, ended up working for him – as the doorman at House of Curson.

In Irene, Irene O'Dare's grandmother warned her granddaughter when she shared her plans about becoming a model for a posh fashion house, "don't forget that sometimes the grandest people are the greatest riffraff." Granny's advice proved reliable, for both the proprietorship and the patrons. And it even became true of Irene O'Dare herself. Her name O'Dare was mistaken as a name of nobility by one of the social patrons of the fashion show and Irene did little to dissuade the woman of this idea. Convinced they were dealing with titled royalty, the society woman and her friends instantly accepted Irene as a peer. In turn,

because of her pedigree, they took her very old-fashioned blue gown as a very revolutionary new look. Irene's employers took the lead of the society women, seeing real promotional opportunities, and positioned Irene as a titled society model. Women of society would have been unimpressed with the daughter of poor Irish immigrants. Believing she was royalty, however, they imitated her every move. The audience joined in with the business manager of Madame Lucy in a conspiracy to mock the wealthy. Irene was housed in an elegant apartment and sent to prestigious events, of course dressed in Madam Lucy gowns. Her blue gown was named "Alice Blue Gown" and it became the rage. A song was written for it and an entire lore of poise, beauty and purity was built around the symbol of this blue gown design. A success montage illustrated the variety of people who had adopted the look, all reaching for some of Irene's magic through wearing the blue creation.

Fashion fiction and films loved to mock the grotesquely rich, privileged and titled. Hollywood's version of fashion designers, with their powers to create (or destroy!) beauty made the rich look ridiculous, all for the entertainment of the working-class female audience. Designers could use their creative authority to sell beautiful clothing to the rich, but the designers were not swept into the foolishness of it all. There was a distinct posture among these designers that fashion was a business and they played the game with those who had the ability to pay, but designers knew it was a game and were often the ones who made the rules.

Most of the depictions represented designers who came from humble beginnings, working people on their way up the ranks of their professions. Lynn was an out-of-work sketch artist. Sophie Miller worked up from a seamstress. And Natalie Upton started her business from nothing. Designers wore beautiful clothing; most of them lived in luxury, had domestic servants and acted as influencers or advisors to the very wealthy. It was an enviable

post, especially to the working-class women in the audience. And the barriers to entry were vague at best. For example, there was no clear measure of necessary education.

But designers operated under hardships. Financial backing was consistently depicted as integral to the success of the business and was always very difficult to acquire. It was usually male designers who discussed money and negotiated with potential backers. Female designers did not seem to worry about this matter. And the customers, across the board, were insufferable. Women seemed to have more trouble dealing with the personalities while men tended to smooth talk the female customers with little difficulty.

Piracy was rampant. This depiction was wholly accurate to the dealings in the real-life industry. Competitors stole from each other as regular business practice. In the Hollywood genre, pirating was considered an annoying, but common practice. Sherwood Nash was not prosecuted when his pirating scam was uncovered. On the contrary, his victims hired him to pirate for them! And, while the creative process was not expanded on film, whatever it involved, not everyone could handle it. As exciting as the fashion world might have seemed, not everyone loved working in it. In Roberta the story hinted at the difficulty in choosing the proper fabric and color for a given design, and in that scene, the audience witnessed Huck, completely intimidated, as so many factors that he did not comprehend contributed to this one decision. And the assistant, Albert, had no respect for leadership that did not know their job. He was relieved to see Princess Stephanie walk into the room. "Finally!" he exclaimed. In Vogues of 1938, Sophie was intensely conscious of how one poor line could weigh badly on the entire collection.

In the end, the tough and smart prevailed, with others falling in their wake, a key factor for a Hollywood happy ending. Designers' showrooms were always very busy and

full of activity. A deadline was always around the corner. It was a very exciting and taxing profession. Two of the designers, Sophie from Vogues of 1938 and Roberta in Roberta, passed away from stress and old age. Prince Muratov could not take the competition and ended up as a doorman for his competitor. In its humorous, glamorous way, Hollywood gave the audience a glimpse of some of what happened behind the beautiful showroom curtains, creating their own version of the truth.

Paris in Hollywood. New York in California

There were a few disconnected observations in Hollywood films about fashion designers that merit discussion. Depictions were exclusively that of the retail design businesses, a fading commodity in the 1930s, with the rapidly expanding and highly publicized segment of the apparel industry, wholesale design, entirely absent from 1930s film. Career literature of the period clearly expressed this as a growing area of apparel industry employment. These choices are due to several reasons. The wholesale realm, with factories and workrooms, was less visually glamorous. Also, at least three of the films were based on novels or stories written prior to this industry shift. Irene was originally produced in 1918. Street of Women and Roberta were published in the early 1930s, and written earlier, so by the time they reached Hollywood production, the industry had moved forward. Fashions of 1934 alluded to copying as a function of mass production, but when an actual setting was depicted, *Maison Elegance* utilized the elegant genre of the retail designer, possibly because, visually, the sumptuous setting of a showroom was more visually appealing than a workroom floor.

Costumes for the films were designed by studio designers, sometimes with several designers responsible for different categories of clothing. The plots showcased these

garments as the crème de la crème of a New York designer or a French designer. This aspect posed an irony, as the "Paris" and "New York" fashions depicted as most elegant and extravagant garments were, in fact, designed by America's very own Hollywood designers who worked primarily in California and who were promoted through other forms of popular literature as true, original American designers. Under contract with studios, Hollywood designers began to build equity into their names via promotion and merchandising tie-ups. For example, under the brand name Cinema Fashions, costume reproductions were sold from films such as Roberta and Vogues of 1938 through major department stores such as R.H. Macy's. The designs were promoted by the name of the film, the stars who wore the fashions and the name of the designer.[50]

Hollywood designers also positioned themselves, along with mainstream California designers, as arbiters of fashion and good taste by writing articles and providing commentary on style. In Photoplay Magazine, Paramount designer Travis Banton was featured in a three-part series about his world and work in films, working with actresses, and Gilbert Adrian was a contributor to mainstream fashion publications.[51]

French houses were depicted, but were always operated by Americans. *Maison Elegance* in Fashions of 1934 was operated by Sherwood Nash; in Roberta House of Roberta was operated by Minnie Roberts of Ohio; In Irene, Madam Lucy of France, not only did not exist, but the owner and business principals were all American men. And all the customers

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[50] Herzog, 135.

[51] Julie Lang Hunt, "Trials and Triumphs of a Hollywood Dress Designer," Photoplay Magazine, April 1936, 23-26; May 1936, 54-55; June 1936, 50; Gilbert .Adrian, "Do American Women Want American Clothes," Harper's Bazaar, January 1934, 37, 135-136; Gilbert Adrian, "Setting Styles through the Stars," Ladies Home Journal, February 1933, 10-11, 40.

visiting these French establishments were American. The only European patron in any of the films was the Polish Countess Tanka Schwarenka in Roberta, and even she turned out to be an American posing as royalty. Perhaps these storylines were so dominated by Americans to make a credible story with American actors. Or possibly, it was a stroke of defiance, claiming American equality, or even superiority to Paris. Throughout the previous decade, Americans were the primary market and significant source of revenue for the French couture. During the 1920s, approximately 300,000-350,000 Americans visited France each year, or about 1,000 Americans per day arriving in Paris. Prior to the Depression, there were a considerable number of Americans shopping in Paris, spending money and, as a result, the American market was used to being catered to by the French.[52]

Paris' mystique as the fashion leader of the world was mocked by Hollywood. In Fashions of 1934, when Baroque's methods of using historic costume books to inspire his collection was uncovered, Lynn Mason began producing sketches from similar sources and with a French signature, they went undetected as forgeries by their clients in America. The message to the audience was clear. If experts cannot tell the difference, why should you? Roberta entertained with ongoing chatter about France and the French ways. European counterparts were depicted unfavorably. In Fashions of 1934, Baroque was weak, too protective of his reputation to stand up to Sherwood Nash. In Irene, Monsieur Dumand (The "first" Madame Lucy) was of low moral character and a womanizer. In Vogues of 1938, the European designer Muratov was a design thief and fake who ultimately had to work as a

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[52] Sheryl Farnan-Leipzig, "An interpretation of "The Bridal Party," a work of short fiction by F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Study in Period Costume Development," presented at ITAA Annual Conference, August 2002, New York, N.Y.

doorman. And in Roberta, a French café owner was belittled because of confusion in understanding the difference in English between "Indians" and "Indianans."

Finally, movies were produced in California but depicted the trade in New York and Paris. The idea that movies were reflectors of society might explain why California designers were not depicted in Hollywood films during the 1930s. During the 1930s, California had an expanding apparel business located in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. This theme was absent from Hollywood films partly because films were often adapted from novels or stories written about the better known Eastern apparel industry, and also because the growing apparel industry in California separated itself very early in its development from the neighboring motion picture industry. While there was a growing and thriving apparel business in California during the 1930s, it was largely separate from the New York apparel industry and, as such, was not reported on or written about until much later in the decade, except in the trade publications. Street of Women and Roberta were based on novels written about New York and Paris markets and Irene was based up on a story and Broadway play from 1918, long before the California business emerged.

The Hollywood motion picture industry and its cavalcade of fan magazines promoted California apparel and the California lifestyle. The California business benefited from the motion picture industry "through Hollywood promotional tie-in labels, product placement in movies, and the extensive use of fashion publicity for upcoming films"[53] and the movie industry became an important promoter. California sportswear, however, was not part of the motion picture tie-ups because the apparel was not especially featured in films. Sportswear

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[53] Sara Berry, Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood, (Minneapolis, M.N.: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xv.

from the California industry became particularly popular through a different venue, promotional stills. Still photography, by as early as 1936, was popular and showed the stars playing and lounging glamorously in the California sunshine. While most motion pictures were limited to black and white photography, promotional photographs and fan magazine stills were printed in color, further showcasing these bright, bold fashions.[54]

"The pioneer nonmovie [*sic*] designers..., struggling to build up a quality trade, eschewed from [*sic*] the movies on the theory that high-income women regarded Hollywood as cheap in an overdressed, befeathered way."[55] The California industry ably organized several trade and promotional organizations to directly promote the California garment industry. These associations also organized fund development for promotional efforts. Long before the initiation of the New York Dress Institute in the East, as early as 1926, an innovative group of designer/manufacturers joined forces to form the Affiliated Fashionists of California. This group was composed of eight women who informally courted buyers from around the country with joint fashion shows, and as women of genteel society, entertained California-style at their impressive homes with patio and pool parties.[56] Their trademark gesture was the gift of a camellia sent to each female buyer who visited California. The Affiliated Fashionists of California was active until 1960.

In addition to Affiliated Fashionists, several other smaller organizations emerged, composed mainly of small manufacturers and serving primarily as business support and networking.[57] The two major associations were the Associated Apparel Manufacturers of Los Angeles (A.A.M.) and The California Apparel Creators (C.A.C.). A.A.M was composed of

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[54] Margaret J. Bailey, Those Glorious Glamorous Years, (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1982), 245.
[55] Porter, 73.
[56] Porter, 67.
[57] Frank J. Taylor, "They Start the Fads," Saturday Evening Post, 9 November 1946, 52.

apparel and allied goods, including shoes, millinery, undergarments, buttons, accessories, textiles, etc.[58] C.A.C., the larger of the two associations, was composed of, as the name implies, primarily apparel manufacturers. Both associations operated from the same headquarters in a posh suite of offices located in downtown Los Angeles, raised funds, and conducted promotional activities to advance the sales and image of California sportswear. Shrewdly, a strategic plan was developed to promote California sportswear within a campaign promoting the overall lifestyle or "California Way of Life." The strategy involved advertising the California Way of Life to the consumer, and then luring buyers to California with treatment beyond any luxury they experienced on New York or even Paris buying trips. "If it's true," wrote one reporter, "as they say, that half the fashion charm of Paris lies in the fact that buyers like to visit the place, then California is on the right track too."[59]

One important decision was made regarding apparel marketing. Joe Zukin, a C.A.C. President, persuaded members to embrace a "California" label instead of a then popular idea of a "Hollywood" label.[60] By developing an advertising co-op plan and "Made in California" labeling campaign, the myriad of small companies comprising the multi-million dollar California garment industry could advertise, promote and, in general, compete on a more impressive level with the large Eastern companies. The labeling campaign became so highly regarded that Eastern firms began using the word "California" in their labeling mechanisms.[61]

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[58] "Fashion Warfare," Business Week, 25 March 1944, 48.
[59] Porter, 67.
[60] Taylor, 52.
[61] "Made In California," Time, 23 September 1946, 88. A note: by the mid 1940s this practice on the part of Eastern firms to use "California" in their marketing and labeling brought about an injunction by the C.A.C. The motion was ultimately denied by the New York federal court.

The list of California garment industry leaders was an eclectic group and included every sort of person from ex-actors, ex-dancers and ex-singers to an ex-street preacher, an ex-cattle rancher, and an ex-lawyer. One observer noted that if a cartoonist were to depict the typical Los Angeles garment manufacturer, he would find it difficult, if not impossible.[62] But a common thread ran through this diverse group. Unlike New York manufacturers, where designers were employees of a firm operated by a businessman, California firms were often owned and operated by the designer, and the designer/owner was often a woman.[63]

The neighboring motion picture industry did not play a major role in the overall promotion of the California garment industry. And the California industry did not pursue promotion from Hollywood. Hollywood studios and costume designers capitalized on tie-up promotions and participated in merchandising recreating their film fashions for the general consumer, but mainstream California apparel creators separated themselves from Hollywood in order to establish a higher price and a level of exclusivity. While California sportswear did appear in fan magazine publicity photos in the 1930s, the specific designer was not credited. When Photoplay Magazine started promoting their own line of apparel, stores were named but not designers, unless the designer owned the store (i.e. Mabs of Hollywood). It was not until the late 1930s that Hollywood began to showcase the California designer and present California fashion as costuming in films.[64]

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[62] "Los Angeles' Little Cutters," Fortune, May 1945, 137.
[63] Porter, 73.
[64] For example, it was not until 1949 in Neptune's Daughter, that Hollywood depicted a California swimsuit designer, and not until 1956 in There's Always Tomorrow that an upscale fashion apparel creator was depicted. In Neptune's Daughter, a feature film audience was, for the first time, treated to a "tour" of a modern clothing manufacturing facility which was embedded into the storyline as Ester Williams toured a group of buyers through her facility. Films like The Women in 1939 did feature some California fashions simply due to the fact that the plot placed women in Reno, Nevada and the costumes worn for part of the film had a definite California or Western flavor. But the fashion show sequences did not include California-inspired apparel. Please refer to Appendix II – Filmography.

Working class audiences escaped into a fantastic world of beautiful women, handsome men, elegant clothing and opulent settings through feature Hollywood films during the 1930s. Using the constructed persona of the fashion designer from various popular culture venues, feature films were not so much a promotional tool on behalf of the industry, but reflected an even more constructed version of the fashion designer back to the audience.

Hollywood gravitated to the more modern interpretation of the fashion designer. Examples of this include the use of sketches, and the very chic, modern appearance of the actresses who portrayed fashion designers. Absent from these interpretations were images of the growing wholesale apparel business in New York, most likely due to lack of aesthetic interest for the purposes of Hollywood glamour constructs. Also absent was the presence of the neighboring California apparel industry, this most likely due to conscious promotional policies of the principal California trade associations.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the American fashion designer portrayed through the diverse publicity and exposure generated during the Depression era. Through career literature, fiction and feature film depictions, and promotion in feature magazine articles, the American woman came to know the creators of her fashions. Throughout the various popular culture formats themes of wholesale design, retail design, income and perquisites, and education and training were consistently discussed. In addition, other themes such as client relations, selling process, work process and attitudes toward the French mystique emerged. A picture was painted of a profession which allowed women to rise to executive leadership, utilize creativity and artistic talent, earn a lucrative salary, and enjoy travel and lavish social opportunities.

Central to this groundswell of publicity were several social and economic issues. During the 1920s congressional limits on immigration combined with increased college enrollment limited the future potential labor pool of the apparel industry. By the 1930s, the Great Depression significantly diminished financial resources of private citizens and industry alike, requiring both to do more with less. Women especially strove to maintain their family's lifestyle, even with diminished income, through a variety of domestic strategies, not the least of which was sewing their family's clothing and remaking garments. Travel to Paris by apparel makers for buying and inspiration was greatly curtailed, especially for the smaller manufacturing firms. And for those firms that could still afford the fare, purchases of inventory or designs to be copied were heavily taxed via protectionist tariffs such as Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930.

Positive industry promotion was imperative. With a legacy of sweatshop working conditions, poor immigrant labor, an image of dressmakers as tradeswomen, the impression that Paris was the seat of all that was fashionable, and that all American clothes were merely copies, the American apparel industry had to elevate its image. Trade organizations such as The Fashion Group and the Fashion Originators Guild of America provided promotion and protection for designers and manufacturers. With the support of several women's professional organizations and vocational education organizations, the American fashion designer proved to be an representative. Retail establishments, like Best and Company, and Lord & Taylor carried this message forward to the consumer with store promotions of American apparel and the women who designed them.

Throughout the 1930s, dozens of women fashion designers were profiled, interviewed and photographed for magazines and career literature. The theme continued in career fiction. And Hollywood churned the theme back to audiences through feature length motion pictures. While each element of popular culture contributed to the construction of this new profession, magazine articles offered the most detailed information to the reader, providing designer interviews and profiles, industry information, and photography. Magazine articles also provided the most insight to the business, managerial, and time demands of the career, in addition to the lavish perquisites and lifestyle. Career literature, provided the most information on salaries, benefits, and perquisites, and gave the widest array of commentary from working designers. However this genre tended to concentrate on the positive aspects of design as a profession, providing little information about demands, problems, setbacks and negative aspects of the job. Conversely, career fiction provided some insights into potential stresses, such as family and domestic conflicts, class issues between employees and

customers, and rivalries or animosities among coworkers. As a story, career fiction only provided a profile of one person's experience, descriptions of hardships remained within an appropriate realm for adolescent readers, and the author was more or less obligated to supply a happy ending. The same was true of Hollywood films. Portrayals of fashion designers and the apparel industry by Hollywood focused more upon the most visually appealing interpretations, forgoing accuracy or in-depth information. While Hollywood portrayed a very modern, chic version of the fashion designer, the setting of the retail designing establishment, while more opulent and visually appealing, did not reflect the growing wholesale business.

Fashion design was not an entry level position, but very much a leadership role in an apparel firm. Promotional media linked recognition to ownership and, while many designers worked for manufacturing firms, many of the designers who were featured in career literature and magazine articles were the owners or had an ownership share in their firms. For most of the decade, retail designers were promoted along with wholesale designers. However, wholesale design was promoted as the most viable choice for career opportunities and growth. As the decade progressed, wholesale designers were promoted to the public as experiencing the greatest increases in salary, perquisites such as travel and entertaining, and lucrative bonuses based on product sales performance or even ownership opportunities such as share in the company.

Specific demand for future wholesale designers was not ever fully described in any of the literature, however. While some specific figures were given with regard to starting pay and potential future earnings, career literature did not offer insight into how many people were actually employed as designers or provide any projections about future design

positions. The possibility of someday achieving a position as a fashion designer was a lure to young women to enter the industry in a number of entry level positions.

In this same vein, certain elements of information were not included in the career literature. One might expect career information to guide a candidate's process in a job search as well as provide information. However there was no information regarding job search strategies such as résumé development, interview techniques, portfolio development, or how to identify or contact companies for employment. Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer mentioned the want ads and the large number of wholesale firms that advertised for various kinds of help. And the designer in Fashions of 1934, Lynn Mason (played by Bette Davis) showed a book of sketches – a portfolio – to Sherwood Nash. Otherwise, there was little guidance or information offered in this area.

While exact employment figures were never disclosed with regard to how many working designers there were, the industry in general was depicted with a sense of enormous size. The apparel business was described throughout the era as generating $1-7 billion with a member roster boasting over 200,000 union workers. This huge scale was also portrayed in the fiction genre. In the career book Frills and Thrills: The Career of a Young Fashion Designer, the heroine, Mary Bray, spent six months moving from manufacturer to manufacturer as a model, never staying for more than a week at any one employer. Mary Bray worked for approximately twenty-four companies within six months, leaving one company and immediately finding employment with another. The implication was an endless stream of employment opportunity, at least in New York.

Designers with experience and consistent success in producing salable garments were reported to have earned extremely lucrative salaries, bonuses, and perquisites such as travel

and lavish social opportunities. Most entry level salaries were compatible with the reported average American earnings, but the salaries of those with even moderate experience were reported to exceed average earnings by as much as 80 percent.

Even though wholesale design was promoted as the area of career growth, film and fictional accounts persisted in depicting the profession after more of the retail design theme. This was most likely an issue of showing a more glamorous and visually appealing setting. Posh show rooms, wealthy clientele and magnificent garments were elements which provided a more glamorous story setting than factory work rooms and armies of seamstresses. Throughout film and fiction, it was New York or Paris designers depicted. California, with its growing apparel business during the 1930s, was absent from any sort of film representation throughout the decade. Movies were produced in California but portrayed New York and Paris. During the 1930s, California had an expanding apparel business located in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. This theme was absent from Hollywood films partly because films were often adapted from novels or stories written about the better known Eastern apparel industry. More compelling, however, was that leadership of the California trade associations made the decision very early in the industry's development that California firms needed to distinguish themselves from the neighboring motion picture industry due to issues of quality and image. Movies appealed to the working class and California designers were striving for a more upscale trade.

Editors of feature magazine articles positioned American designers as leaders to the masses on style and taste. Paris clothed the elite few who had the time and money required, and was depicted in several articles as virtually irrelevant to the needs of the masses of average American women who were clothed stylishly and, for the most part, economically,

by talented American designers. Paris, while marketing their product effectively to the American public, did little to meet the specific needs of most American women.

Design, as a profession, was depicted as demanding work. Potential for large salaries and an interesting lifestyle aside, designers worked hard to produce a quantity of salable garments, facing the necessary deadlines to prepare for mass production. America's designers were managerial, practical, smart and original. Inspiration was discussed repeatedly, with Paris fashions only one of many resources used by American talent. These same feature magazine articles continued to impress Americans through discussion of size of the industry. And salaries were mentioned in feature magazine articles, but in a different context than when mentioned in the career literature. Instead of as a recruiting enticement, large salaries were discussed more in the context to establish credibility and position designers as leaders. Designers were not dressmakers in the employ of the well-to-do women of America, rather American women were to now look up to designers as dedicated professional women, leaders of fashion and style.

Femininity was frequently woven into the discussion. Even as leaders of an enormous industry, American designers did not lose their femininity. This point was reiterated throughout various popular culture elements. Career fiction assured young women, through the storytelling, that women with careers were still feminine, attractive and desirable. Magazine articles also supported this. Designers were often described as slim or small, lovely, charming and vivacious. Visual images depicted these women as beautifully dressed and coiffed, often smiling or laughing with their fitting models or others in the photograph.

One interesting aspect of the popular culture portrayal of the American designer was the discussion of education and training. There did not seem to be one truly defined

educational track for a young woman to pursue who wished to become a designer. Education and training requirements were indefinite and varied according to the author. Some formal education was better than none. But without formal education, a candidate with the right qualities could find employment in an entry level position and work her way up. Acceptable training included almost any area of the apparel field except working as a seamstress or other production job. Production jobs and seamstress work were not in keeping with the need for a higher caliber level of employee. Acceptable qualities included the ability to work very hard, and having a personal flair for design and color, often depicted as immediately noticeable in the designer's personal appearance. The candidate also needed a developed skill to communicate ideas to others in the process, either through draping or sketching. The combination of education with practical experience was highly regarded. However, according to several sources, prevailing educational programs fell short of industry needs and expectations. Fashion design required business acumen, but business courses were not included in most curricula. Also, most programs trained students for personal wardrobe development (Home Economic programs) or for the more traditional retail business (art and design programs). But the growing opportunity was in wholesale design, and educational programs fell short in training for the specific needs of this segment of the industry. Designs needed to be developed for mass development, not the individual client. According to the literature, industry was often left to train its own in this regard and, it was reported, that some business leaders without the benefit of formal education themselves, might be put off by a young candidate too overly impressed with his or her studio, academic or other formal training.

The designers who were profiled and interviewed came from a variety of educational experiences. Some were self-taught by making clothing for their dolls and later for themselves and family members. Others transferred formal art training into fashion design skills. Many worked their way up through the apparel industry ranks from sales or work room experience. One key point made throughout the literature was that they were all American. And if they were not born in America, it was often stressed how they embraced America by becoming a citizen.

American designers were feminine, chic sophisticated, wealthy and original on one hand. On the other hand they were regular people, practical, managerial and American. Promotion with this combination of traits and qualities made them superstars. American designers were the new leaders of style and good taste, yet approachable to the estimated 45 million American women who purchased garments manufactured by the American apparel industry.

APPENDIX I: FASHION DESIGN SALARIES REPORTED IN 1930s CAREER LITERATURE

Year Source	Position	Reported starting salary	Reported experienced salary	Other benefits	Reported average wage*
1909 1.	**Dressmaker** *Apprentice level* *Experienced* Employed - Trimmer - Fitter Self employed	$2.00/week Possibly worked for free to gain experience. $4-6.00 with more experience	 $12-14/week $15-18/week "Big Money"	For those who were employed, the opportunity for employment was considered a benefit. For those who opened their own establishments, "freedom" was promoted as a significant benefit.	$12.29 per week (employees worked average of 59 hours per week). *
1920 2.	**Wholesale Manufacturer** *Apprentice level* *Experienced* - Designer	$25.00/week	 $200-250.00/week	Enjoyment of luxuries, travel and social life.	$1,236 per year*
1922 3.	**Custom Dressmaking** *Apprentice level* *Experienced* **Wholesale Manufacturer** *Apprentice level* - Designer - Blouse maker - Draper - Cloak/Suit tailor *Experienced* - Designer - Blouse maker - Draper - Cloak/Suit tailor	$35.00/week $50.00/week $60.00/week $20.00/week $35.00/week	 $10,000/year◈ ($200.00/week) $25,000/year◈ ($500/week) $250.00/week $100.00/week $3-10,000/year◈ ($60-200.00/week)	 Options for share of the business based on sales percentages.	$1,236 per year*

1936 **4.**	**Wholesale Manufacturer** *Apprentice level* - Model hands - Assistant designers *Experienced* Designers - Low to medium priced goods - Higher priced goods - Others	 $15.00/week $25-35.00/week	 $50-100.00/week $100-150.00/week $300-400.00/week Several reports as high as $50,000 per year◈ ($1,000.00/week)	For salaries greater than $200.00 per week, it was reported compensation included a share of the business/profit sharing based on a percentage of sales. Travel was also included as an additional benefit.	$1,368 per year✳
1940 **5.**	**Wholesale Manufacturer** *Apprentice level* - Model hands - Assistant designers *Experienced* Designers - General - In larger cities - Others	 $15.00/week $25-35.00/week	 $50-100.00/week $100-150.00/week $300-400.00/week	Good working conditions, year round employment with little risk of being laid off, travel and luxurious social opportunities, and family friendly.	

◈ To determine weekly salary for comparison purposes, annual salary figure was divided by 50 weeks.
✳ Wage information represents an average for all wage earners in all industries for the decade.
SOURCE: "American Cultural History." Kingswood College Library. <http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decade20.html> (Retrieved 12 January 2005).
1. Richardson, Anna Steese. The Girl Who Earns Her Own Living. New York: B.W. Dodge & Co., 1909.
2. McGowan, Francis. "Designing, A Vocation for College Women." In Careers for Women. Edited by Catherine Filene. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920.
3. Richards, Charles R. Art in Industry. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922.
4. Costume Design as an Occupation. New York: Federated Council on Art Education and the Institute of Women's Professional Relations, 1936.
5. Careers in Fashion Designing. Chicago, I.L.: The Institute for Research, 1940.

APPENDIX II: FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Film	Description	Studio Director Actors Costume Designer	Sources and Notes
1932	**Street of Women**	Madame Natalie, *"couturier"* of Fifth Avenue district in an affair with architect.	**Warner Brothers** *Archie Mayo*	"Street of Women" by Polan Banks 1931
1934	**Fashions of 1934**	Bootlegging Paris fashions. Billed by Warner Brothers as the first movie to tell the tale of models and designers. Busby Berkeley floor show extravaganza situated amid a story of fashion scandals and money-making scams.	**Warner Brothers** *William Dieterle* William Powel Bette Davis **Orry-Kelly**	Story: "The Fashion Plate" by William Duff
1935	**Roberta**	When one of France's noted dressmakers dies, she leaves her fashion house, the celebrated "Roberta's," to her young American nephew.	**RKO** *William A. Seiter* Irene Dunne Fred Astaire Ginger Rogers **Bernard Newman**	Novel: "Gowns by Roberta" by Alice Duer Miller Also a Broadway play-music by Jerome Kern
1937	**Vogues of 1938**	Young debutante tries to save the family fortune by working as a model and falls for designer George Curson, owner of The House of Curson.	**Paramount** *Irving Cummings* Joan Bennett Warner Baxter **Helen Taylor** **Sally Victor** – hats **John Fredericks** – hats and accessories **Irene** – Constance Bennett's wardrobe **Omar Kiam** – Helen Vinson's wardrobe and fashion shows	**NOTE:** In the 1920s, French designer LeLong married a penniless Princess who found work at his perfume counter. **NOTE:** This film was originally planned for a 1934 production and release, but the producer wanted to wait until Technicolor had been more advanced and waited until 1938.
1938	**The Women**	Mary Haines learns that her husband is having an affair and goes to Reno with a group of other women for a divorce.	**MGM** *George Cukor* Norma Shearer Rosalind Russell Joan Crawford **Adrian**	Story by Claire Boothe Luce Screenplay by Anita Loos
1940	**Irene** *Remade from 1926 film*	Promotion of "Madame Lucy" gowns through a high society scheme.	**C&C Films** *Herbert Wilcox* Anna Neagle Ray Milland **Edward Stevenson**	Based on a Broadway play produced the first time in 1918.
1949	**Neptune's Daughter**	Romantic comedy about a tough-minded California swimsuit designer/ manufacturer, and a South American polo player. Swimsuit fashion show and water ballet featuring Williams.	**MGM** *Edward Buzzell* Esther Williams Ricardo Montalban **Irene**	**NOTE:** Cole of California designed William's swimsuits for her MGM films. She was his model in advertising. MGM would not allow screen credit.
1956	**There's Always Tomorrow**	A California fashion designer comes back to her old home town, New York, to promote her line and reunites with an old flame.	*Douglas Sirk* Barbara Stanwyck Fred MacMurray **Jay A. Morley Jr.**	Based on a novel by Ursula Parrott. **NOTE:** Remake of a 1934 film. Not known if the plotline involved a fashion designer.

APPENDIX III: AMERICAN DESIGNERS PROMOTED DURING THE 1930s

The following is a list of designers included among the sources used for this research from 1930 through 1939.

Designer	Type of Designer	Designer	Type of Designer
Carol	Wholesale	Alan Kramer	Retail
Louiseanders	Retail	Marie Leeds	
Dorine Abrade	Wholesale	Josette de Lima	
Gilbert Adrian	Hollywood	Maybell Manning	Retail
Grace Arcuri	Wholesale	Vera Maxwell	Sportswear
Charles Armour		Sally Milgrim	Retail and Wholesale
Shirley Baker	Wholesale	Reneé Montague	
Travis Banton	Hollywood	Germaine Monteil	Wholesale
Eve Bennet	Wholesale	Veda Moore	
Hattie Carnegie	Retail and Wholesale	Leslie Morris	
Francis Clyne	Retail	Bernard Newman	Hollywood
Helen Cookman	Wholesale	Gladys Parker	Wholesale
Jo Copeland	Wholesale	Ruth Payne	
Dorothy Cox		Clare Potter (Clarepotter)	Wholesale
Lilly Daché	Wholesale	Natalie Renke	Wholesale
Pauline Fields	Wholesale	Edith Marie Reuss	
Fifi	Retail and Wholesale	Mary Robinson	
Polly Francis	Retail	Nettie Rosenstein	Wholesale
Mrs. W.B. Franklin	Retail	Royer	Hollywood
Mrs. (Sophie) Gimbel (wife of Adam Gimbel, President of Saks)		Alice Smith	
Dorine Gourdon	Butterick Patterns	Caroline E. Smith	Vogue Patterns
Howard Greer	Hollywood	Adele Smithline (Simpson)	
Elizabeth Hawes	Retail	Herbert Sondheim	
G. Howard Hodge	Wholesale	Robert Ten Eyck Stevenson	
Peggy Hoyte	Retail	Herman Patrick Tappé	Retail
Emmet Joyce	Retail	Lillian Templeton	Hollywood
Alice Kelly	Wholesale	Ethel Traphagen	
Orry Kelly	Hollywood	Jessie Franklin Turner	Retail
Omar Kiam	Hollywood	Valentina	Retail
Muriel King	Retail	Sally Victor	Wholesale (millinery)
Kiviette	Wholesale	Lisbeth Von Kraus a.k.a. Lisbeth Von Krausz a.k.a. "Lisbeth"	Wholesale
Margot De Bruyn Kops a.k.a. Margot Kops McClintock	Wholesale	Betty Witcoff	Simplicity Patterns

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Now, Voyager. Directed by Irving Rapper. 1hr. 57 min. Warner Brothers, 1942, videocassette.

Roberta. Directed by William A. Seiter. 1hr. 46 min. MGM/UA, 1935, videocassette.

Street of Women. Directed by Archie Mayo. 1hr. 49 min. Warner Brothers, 1937. 16mm film.

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Vogues of 1938. Directed by Irving Cumings. 1hr. 49 min. Paramount, 1937, videocassette.

The Women. Directed by George Cukor. 2hr. 13 min. MGM/UA 1939, videocassette.

Archives and Special Collections

Wisconsin Historical Society: The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. University of Wisconsin – Madison, Wisconsin, 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706.

The Watson Library Microforms. University of Kansas – Lawrence, Kansas, 1425 Jayhawk Blvd., Lawrence, KS.

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